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BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1331.

GIDEON'S ROCK AND OTHER TALES
BY
KATHERINE SAUNDERS.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

JOAN MERRYWEATHER 1 vol.

GIDEON'S ROCK

AND OTHER TALES

BY

KATHERINE SAUNDERS.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1873.

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GILDED'S ROCK

AND OTHER TALES



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1875

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GIDEON'S ROCK.

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GIDEON'S ROCK



PART I.

IN the fall of this year of our Lord 1810, I, Gideon Weir, do send these papers, containing the history of my life, to Alice Weir, to be the property of her grand-children, desiring that the same papers be not unsealed for a space of sixty years.

As in the old times I have cast my net back into the sea in disgust at having drawn up in it weeds and stones and unclean reptiles instead of fish, I now send my thoughts into the past; discontented and sorrowful at the memories they return with, and bidding them go back again and yet again in search of better things.—But I know that this is idle work. God made the sea wherein I cast my fisher's net, and therefore it was no folly in hoping and casting for the hundredth time; but of *this* sea, this past of my own making, what dare I hope?

Come, then, Gideon, one cast more, one minute's

thought, then take thy haul, and make the best thou canst of it.

Ah! what a haul it is! How shall I dare to open such a net of memory, so bulged and distorted by the monsters that it has brought up? Surely, there is nothing in God's awful sea so hideous as these things which my sickened and mournful eyes dare not refuse to know as the companions of my youth.

What monster is this that nearly fills the net, strangling to death in its coils whatever of good comes near it? I look at it, and find its green eyes horribly familiar to my own. Its name is Jealousy; and from my childhood it has spread its coils about my steps, withering all happiness before them.

And these, which it has drawn in with it, what are they? Black Treachery—do I see there? Betrayal of kith and kin? But I sicken: I can look no more.

Impure net! Shall I give way to my disgust, and cast it back from whence it came, and draw it in no more? It seems to me that I must indeed do so; but whilst I bend over it in my despair, a warm hope creeps into my veins, and thrills me with a sense of something being hidden here—something dazzlingly pure, sweet, precious.

To what shall I liken it, this gem of beauty amongst the scaly monsters and slimy reeds? To some precious stone—some diamond on which the rainbow's light has fallen in miniature reflection, and has never left? Or shall I liken it to some small, pink shell for whom God has taken all the music of the ocean, and made it into a murmur for its voice; the beauty of which has power to make these monsters crouch—charmed, appalled, and powerless? Behold, Gideon, they die, and the threads of thy net grow golden; take courage, then, and cast it not back, but be sure that this Love which gilds it shall lighten the ways of thy past life which thy pen is to reveal.

I was born at Hawkshold, a village on the Kentish coast; but as my life, up to the age of thirty, was filled by nothing more or less honourable than smuggling adventures by sea and by land, I shall go back no further than a certain night on which it seems to me that the strange history I wish, for many reasons, to write down before I die, did in truth have its beginning.

I feel myself under the old, low roof again, in the smoke and wind, and the light and heat of the fire-side of home—my first home, my only home for thirty

years. I see us all—the five of us busy with our different devices. I see first the two giants; they take up nearly half the room. One sits on a barrel mending nets; the other lies his full length upon the floor, and watches him. The industrious Goliath is my brother Andrew; the idle one, his half-silly comrade, who never leaves him, Jacob Junk.

My mother has her stool and spinning-wheel in the middle of the room. I see her black eyes and upright figure, her withered hand, swift and steady, her calmly-closed mouth at once so gentle and firm. I see her, and I remember where Andrew had his handsome looks from—his grand black eyes, which in after years it seems to me have looked on me from famous pictures I have seen, pictures of men, poor fishers like ourselves, but called away to be fishers of men.

My father has his chair, the only one in the place, drawn up close before the fire, and sits cowering over it, mumbling of things and men that have ceased to be.

The draught from the window, which a fierce storm shakes noisily, blows his white hair about his eyes, disturbing his already uncertain vision, and

making his eyes wince or dilate or glare fixedly with the different strange fancies that are troubling him.

A little away from him, seated on a locker with the candle, the only one, close to him, behold myself, Gideon Weir, with a book in his hands, and see if they do not well call him Wolf Weir.

Silent, savage of eye, wild and tawny of hair and face as his namesake. Yes, there he is, looking up with a low growl at the least disturbance, whether it be a laugh from the giants as they whisper together,—or the weak, piping complaints of his father,—or the voice of his mother speaking some comforting words to her old husband, so much lower down life's hill than herself.

"Come, father," she says, "you're getting tired; we'll have supper soon, and you shall go to bed."

The old man listens, and gives several little jerks of his head round in the direction the kind voice comes from, so that one sees his thoughts are making slowly towards the spinner in the middle of the room.

"Supper," he repeats shakily, "supper! 'taint supper time, Deborah, the lads ain't come in yet. Where's the lads?"

"They won't be here to-night, father," says Andrew, in a deep voice, which makes Wolf Weir glance up with a frown like a thunder-cloud. "There's work over at Folkestone to-night; don't you remember 'em talking about it last supper-time?"

"Work, is there!" Then, with sudden life shining in his eyes through his silvery hair, "Deborah, what are my lazy louts at home for, when the other lads are gone?"

"Put him to bed," growls Wolf; "Junk, put him to bed."

The ragged Goliath on the floor tells me with an oath to do it myself, for which he gets a kick from Andrew, who answers his father's question as if he were himself the weak, and the old man the strong and to be feared one. This he does too without so much as one blameful look at Wolf, who is ashamed, but hates himself for being so, and his brother for making him so.

My brother Andrew then did, I say, with infinite care and patience, explain once more to the old man what had already been explained to him several times in the course of the day.

Again he made him to understand how important cargoes, having to be unladen at Folkestone and con-

veyed to an inland town, all our gang were gone with arms and horses to do the business; and also that, since trustworthy men were needed to remain behind, to give them warning on their return whether they might or might not appear with safety, and likewise to guard certain stores in the village, myself, Andrew, and Junk had been deemed fittest for the task; more especially as the goodness of our fishing trade kept us less open to suspicion than any of the rest.

Before he had finished his explanations, my father had again fallen into the despondency from which our supposed idleness or cowardice had for a minute or two drawn him.

He began to repine at not having been called to take the lead of the expedition.

"Never said a word to me about it. Headstrong lads! Me as 'as bin a'most the making o' free trade i' these parts. Don't they remember who brought 'em in at Westland Haven i' the face o' twenty—thirty—revenue sogers?—who put 'em up to shutting the sogers in a cave?"

"Ah, you 'a seen grand times, father!" my mother said soothingly. "Time you rested now, old man."

"Then there's Benacre—ay, Benacre! Benacre!

Don't they remember Benacre? Who led 'em, forty and odd, with all the cargo, through Benacre Street? Headstrong lads! Free trade's a-going to ruin. Five hundred of our lads we could arm i' this place once. Why don't they stick to a good leader when they ha' got one? They called me the Smuggler King in Benacre."

"And so thou wast, my man," says my mother, looking up proudly. "There's ne'er a one o' thy two sons 'll e'er come up to thee. Will thy Gideon there—thy Wolf, as they call him?—will he ever do aught to the glory o' free trade, with his long nose in a book fro' morn till night? And as for thy Andrew——" Did she think Wolf heard not the change in her voice—the swelling of love and pride in it? "As for thy great moon-faced Andrew, while he can break his fast once a day, and feel the sun shine on him once a year, he'll be too happy and comfortable to care for aught else; that's to say, so long as his lubberly Junk may follow at his heels, and pick up his crumbs, and live in his great shadow. Young men had something else to think of than ease and comfort when *I* was a girl."

"I'll swear to that, dame," mutters Junk, intending a compliment.

"I'll swear thee supperless, thou loppits," says my mother, "if you don't bestir yourself, and mind the fire, and do something for your living. As for love-foolery, if that's what you mean, there's bin no lack o' that wi' thy two fine young masters, if gossips and one's own eyes may be believed. Sixty years I've lived in bonny Hawkshold, and only learnt i' this last month that the nearest way home from the caves is round by Eben Flemming's."

"Hold, dame: here's Andy cut his finger to the bone," said Junk mischievously.

"And there's Wolf 'll set his hair a-fire," adds my mother.

Wolf draws his head farther from the flaring candle, and makes believe to be too well engaged with his book to have heeded what hath been said; but he is in truth looking over it, like any basilisk, at Andrew hacking away with his clasp knife at a knot in his net, his great eyes lowered shyly as a girl's, his bearded face confused and vexed.

Not alone confused and vexed, but lighted and softened by something strange and new to it, as if my mother's words had given a touch of sweet reality to some secret dreamlike joy within him.

Wolf sits and eyes him, as if he would like to

spring, and seize him by the throat, and wring from him the meaning of that look.

"Ah, my lad," says his mother, looking at her giant as if she could well be jealous of any living woman that might come between them, "there's more to be looked for in a free-trader's wife than dainty airs and spick-and-span neatness. She's a pretty foot in her thin shoe, has Mistress Alice, and a bit of a baby hand white as e'er a lady in Kent; but what's that to thee, my son? In *thy* sweetheart, Andrew, I look for a foot that 'll fly bare over stones and rocks to help thee land when needs be, as mine has done to help thy father times out o' mind, and a hand that can pull an oar or a trigger—that's the girl for a smuggler's wife, my boy."

"Then the Lord keep me single," mutters Junk.

"Amen, with all my heart, Junk," says his mistress. "Never fear, lad, there's ne'er a woman in Hawkshold that'll try to thwart thee in that wish."

"What are they talking about?" asks my father, turning helplessly to Wolf. "Has my son Andrew bin a courtin'? has my son Andrew got a sweetheart?"

"Best known to himself," growls Wolf, with a savage look at his brother, which the giant meets with eyes full of trouble.

"I want to see her, Deborah," the old man persists in a flutter of peevish excitement; "where is she? where's my son Andrew's sweetheart?"

"Nonsense, father," answers my mother, stopping her wheel that he may hear her the better. "Andrew's got no sweetheart. It hasn't come to courting yet, but the boys are both mad after old Flemming's girl."

"Flemming! what, old Eben Flemming—his daughter?"

"Yes, yes; you know Alice Flemming?"

"Alice, little Alice! it can't be her; she's only six years old—she told me so yesterday."

"Nay, nay, old man," says my mother with a sigh, "that was a long yesterday. Alice is eighteen now. Look at your own sons—Flemming's child has grown up as well as them."

"Flemming," repeats my father, losing his thoughts in the past again, "Eben Flemming—sly, sly, sly! Yes, I know—sly dog, Flemming."

My mother now gets up, and puts her wheel in its corner. She gives us our supper of broth, with a lump of rye-bread each; and I think Junk's is the largest, though he gets a box on the ear along with it.

"Come, my white-faced scholar," she says to Wolf, taking away his book, and giving him his bowl

of broth; and I submit with a less wolfish grace than usual.

I remember my hand trembled as I took it from her. Why? Had I some foreboding that it was the last time I should receive food from that dear and faithful old hand which had fed me from my birth? I cannot tell. I only know that at that moment my heart seemed to leap to her as if some foreboding of separation pierced its numbed affection to the nerve. Whether she read something more human than usual in my eyes as I looked at her, I know not; but she paused beside me when she had placed the bowl in my hands, and, passing her hard, gentle fingers along my burning forehead, said to me—

“Ah! my Wolf, I would to God thee hadst thy brother Andrew's happy heart.”

At this I hardened. From that moment I had no love for my mother till that had passed which made her look on it as a crime to retain in her good heart anything but hatred for me.

The storm had by this time become so violent that it was all my mother could do to keep the window from bursting in. Junk said it was Lucifer and all his angels rising from the sea and hurling defiance at heaven. He called the wind their howling; the hail-

stones dashing on the window, the chattering of their teeth; and the sudden torrents of rain, the tears they shed as heaven's lightning smote them.

He was in this way amusing Andrew, who had come to the fire to warm himself, and at whose feet Junk was sitting, or rather sprawling in everybody's way, and my father was still muttering about Eben Flemming and the things which the name had brought to his mind, when we all heard a noise at the door which the storm could not have made.

"It's old Lucifer dead beat and wanting shelter," said Junk.

"It's old Flemming's wooden leg," said my mother. "I know *that* knock well enough."

I looked at Andrew, and met his eyes, big as saucers with astonishment.

"Old Flemming?" he said, rising in his slow way. Andrew could never speak or move quickly for the life of him. I also rose and made as I would open the door. But by this time my mother had already done so, and the sight we saw there caused both Andrew and myself to drop stupidly back into our seats.

It was indeed old Flemming, but not alone. His

lovely little daughter was with him, and he stumped into the room leaning on her slight arm.

"Save us, dame! — here's a night!" said he. "I don't know how I should have found your nest, but Alice took me in tow. See, the child's drenched. Take off your hood, Ally."

My mother had at first stood still, looking coldly enough at the girl; but when in obedience to her father she put back her hood and turned her large eyes timidly towards her, the good soul bustled up, and removing her cloak, led her nearer to the fire. Junk took his pipe from his mouth and stared. Andrew's eyes also seemed drawn to her against his will; mine had never left her face since she entered.

We forgot old Eben Flemming and the strangeness of his visit at such a time, and on such a night. We forgot to wonder what he would think of my father muttering about him and his slyness, which he continued to do, being far too weary and sleepy to be aware of who our visitors were, or to trouble himself in any way about them.

I would show you now the woman that I loved, and that the best man I ever met on God's earth loved likewise; not *better* than I loved her — neither

man nor angel could do that — but as well, and with a happier love.

I would show her to you, the little maid of our rough hearts, the idol of our eyes, but I cannot. No, Alice, I cannot paint your bonny cheek, though I dipped my pen into my heart's blood, that comes back strong and warm as I write your name; my words would but make your blush seem faded and your eyes dim.

The women of our band were a brave set enough, one or two as brave or braver than any man amongst us, and how much more cunning in cases of sudden danger we often had to learn to our admiration and sometimes to our cost — for they knew how to value their timely services only too well.

Yet there were honest lasses enough among them, honest as honesty went with us, with hearts good and true as well as stout, and faces pretty as well as bold and tanned.

But Alice was not of this kind, and perhaps we loved her because she was so different; because she did not remind us of the rough sea and the rough trade we drove; and because her voice had tuned itself to the birds' voices, and the sweet sounds of the

land, instead of to the wild winds that made ours hoarse as ravens.

Pretty land-flower! who stopped your bright blooming? Who came like a blighting mist from the sea, and blanched you, and breathed bitterness into your soft unfolding heart?

Sweet land-bird! who listened to your happy voice and aimed death at you? Was it verily this hand that trembles as it makes this pale, word-image of you—Ally! Ally!

I cannot tell if one should call her fair or dark, for though her face was as the purest white and pink, I remember an eyelash black as jet, that kept too jealous a guard over the blue jewel which drew all looks upon it.

She was the smallest, slightest woman in the village, yet she looked tall if you saw her by herself. I think it was because she was all grace and lightness, and as well balanced as a lily on its stem—as a fountain of water in the air.

I suppose she was with us in the village from her birth, but we never noticed her as a child. The life we led made our senses too gross to be touched by the delicate promise of a bud, by the faint prophecies of early spring. It was only when the full rose nodded

at our cottage doors, and the trees were green, and the corn was high, that our dull hearts began to take notice of the summer being in. So it was that we had no eyes for the skipper's daughter till *her* eyes met us in all the blue glory of their summer.

He loved her first, and it was the sight of his love that attracted me towards her; and then, before I guessed what was befalling me, I found myself his rival.

At first I thought her cold, heartless—too fair and fragile to hold a human passion in her. But watching her, using all the power of my mind to understand her and the sweet changes of her face, I discovered by her manner when we two approached that one of us was loved by her. Which was it?

Oh, that I could have known! Oh, that I could have been spared that agony of doubt I suffered! There were times when Andrew's face half convinced me that he knew himself beloved. I have seen him, just after we have passed her—I have seen him drawn up out of himself a very king of giants, and stepping like a king, his chest heaving, his mouth—not smiling, but wearing a look more of happiness than any smile; his dark, gleaming eyes turned from me half in scorn and half in pity for my fierce, searching gaze. But as

often have I seen him look at me, in my moments of wild hope, with honest, humble envy; and a misery which, though always patient and subdued, was, I do in my soul believe, as profound as my own. When I have seen him in these moods only the more zealously industrious, unselfish and gentle, turning the very pain of his soul into balm for those around him, Cain himself, witnessing Abel's rich sacrifice to the Lord, could scarce have known a more passionate envy.

I do perhaps owe it to a life so barren of good as mine to confess that I have at times been so moved by this man's love — a love as gentle, as giant-like as himself—I have been so moved that could I have forced the girl to love him, and accept him for her husband, I would verily have done so.

But it was ordained that our two spirits, so unequal in strength, should be tried by an equal share of hope, fear, and suspense. As we had neither of us any opportunity of serving Alice herself, all we could do was to lie in wait for and seize every chance of serving her father. Old Flemming took our attention very kindly. He was a man who always had much small business in hand, having an inveterate love of money and of making money, though he was, if reports might be believed, already much richer than he ap-

peared to be. He was the owner of a Folkestone cutter, which, under cover of a small trade in dry goods, did a profitable business in a very quiet and safe way. But Eben had other irons in the fire. He had been captain of a large merchant ship; and had made, as he said, many *friends* in different parts of the world—friends who did not mind transacting special little bits of business for him, as he made it to their own profit to do so, whether they might chance to be in the service of Government or not. As Eben found it necessary to send affectionate inquiries and advice occasionally to these *friends*, and was himself no penman, the services of Wolf the scholar (who could barely read and write) did not come amiss to him.

Many a moment of intoxicating happiness has Wolf known when seated at such a task in old Eben's vine arbour on a summer's evening; receiving the instructions imparted to him more by winks of Fleming's cunning little eyes, and pokes from his wooden leg, than by words, and knowing that every stroke of his pen was being followed by lovely eyes full of admiration and envy.

At such times—times of misery for him—Andrew would perhaps be sitting near us on the garden wall

smoking his pipe, his eyes looking up at the smoke with an expression that I can now call little less than sublime; for he looked after those wreaths as if they were verily the fond hopes of his soul, his mind, his strength, and to which as he saw them departing, he said—

“Go, then! Return to the God who gave thee! Thou art lovely! Shall I ever see thee more?”

But if Wolf proved useful as the secretary of the persevering old money-maker, Andrew was of untold service to him in doctoring two wretched old boats; which, though frequently required in keeping mysterious appointments at sea in all sorts of weather, were in a shockingly dilapidated condition. He also dug in his garden, trained his vine, and mended his roof. Thus we were quits.

Flemming knew well enough that we both loved his daughter. We were too blunt and rough to conceal from him that we served him for no other reason. Which of us did he favour?

I cannot now tell whether he really thought seriously of either of us as the husband of Alice; but it was not unpleasant to him to have two strong fellows at his beck and call. Therefore, without saying much, he allowed us both to hope; he even secretly fed the

hope of each, unknown to the other. The honesty of Andrew, who thought it a sin to conceal from me that he had received such a hint, exposed this new danger, and put us on our guard.

Thus, still we were quits, even to the very night when old Flemming and his daughter stood so unexpectedly before us at our fireside.

"Sly old dog, that Flemming," said my father, still sitting with his back to us all, and his thoughts and the present moment years asunder.

"What! does the old boy know me?" exclaimed Flemming. "Bless me, I thought he was too far gone for that."

"And you are right, neighbour," answered my mother, laying her hand on the back of her husband's chair, "he does not know you. We were speaking of you awhile ago, and sometimes when he gets a name in his mouth, he'll keep it, and turn it over and over, like a morsel o' bread as he can't swallow."

"Poor old chap!" said Flemming, patting my father's shrinking shoulder with a grand air. "Poor old chap, then!"

The Smuggler King of Benacre turned his face slowly round to the right shoulder which had been

thus molested, and glared through his silver hair at the hand lying there, then clenching his left fist unseen by Flemming, brought it slowly up to it and dealt it a sudden and sharp rap. The wooden leg retreated.

"Ah, I see," said its master, "don't know me at all: poor old Weir! breaking fast—ain't he?"

It's a wonder poor Junk had not every bone in his body broken by the kicks Andrew gave him to keep him from exploding with laughter.

Junk worshipped his old master next to Andrew, and had a downright hearty hatred for Flemming, whose double-faced treatment of us he no doubt appreciated better than we could in the blindness of our love. He detected all his little meannesses, and laughed at his pompous manners; for Flemming, with all his parsimony, gave himself the airs of an admiral, which made his wooden leg and turned-up nose appear at times too ridiculous for Junk's gravity. For ourselves, I think we should have found a certain charm in the man, even had he not been the father of Alice. His adventurous life, his furtive ambition, his cunning and ability, drew us to him in spite of ourselves.

His first words to Andrew and me that night, as

he mysteriously beckoned us to the window, were such as to inspire us instantly with the very feelings he wished to arouse.

“Look ye here, my lads,” said he, pointing from the window to the heaving and foaming sea, “look at my brave steed Briny here, that I’ve ridden round the world upon. D’ye see how he tosses his mane to-night, and covers his bonny sides with foam? What’s the matter with him? I’ll tell ye. He sniffs fortune to-night, my boys. Hark ye! how he snorts and howls for some brave rider to bestride him and scent it out! Hist, give me your ear. Wolf, and you, Goliath, bring yours down from heaven and listen.”

Now Eben Flemming made known his news to us after his own manner, which was a manner sometimes almost incomprehensible even to ourselves. I will try and translate what he said to us into common English. He had, it appeared, received news (*how*, he concealed from us, according to his usual custom),—he had news that his cutter would be lying off Gideon’s Rock at dusk, waiting to be discharged of its cargo,—a most unusually valuable one, consisting of tea, French brandy, and some costly bales of silk. These last had been concealed by one of Flemming’s *friends* be-

tween the decks of an East-Indiaman, and had been transferred to the cutter from the port-hole on one side of the ship while the revenue men were boarding it on the other.

This was, Flemming confessed, almost too bold a move. There was reason, he said, to believe it had been seen,—that his cutter had been suspected and pursued, but had been managed so well as to give her pursuers the slip. They had lost sight of her, and she was now here, waiting in the very jaws of danger, for men and boats to unlade her that she might be back on her proper course again before she was discovered. In such a job as this there was no little risk, even had all our men been ready at our command instead of miles away. A new inspector, as hardy and crafty a fellow as ever lived to trouble better men than himself, had lately been appointed in our locality, and was said to be determined to hold no terms with us. Our fame in the neighbourhood, and the secret threats conveyed to him from us, made no impression on him. He kept troops always ready, and if he made any discovery and capture, gave us the benefit of the recent laws in their utmost severity. It is true, we had a friend in one of the officers under this man, and we still felt we might rely on him in any case of

extremity, though as yet the danger of being suspected by his new master had kept him much aloof from us.

The remembrance of these things flashed through our minds while Flemming was relating to us the dangerous situation of his cutter; and we naturally waited in a torment of suspense to hear how such an undertaking, if we did attempt it, was to bring us the good fortune his first words had hinted at. I think he waited so long to see if we were not sufficiently generous, and in love, to offer our services and risk our lives without the prospect of any other reward than the pleasure of serving him. But his first words had set our hearts burning with all sorts of wild hopes, hopes which had grown as the danger and importance of the enterprise became fully understood by us.

Studying our countenances furtively with his small searching eyes, he soon saw how things were with us, and that it would not be wise to play with us just then. Suddenly he threw out his hands.

“Wolf, thy paw,” said he, “and thou, Goliath, give me thy mighty fist. And now, tell me, like honest lads as you are, can I do fairer than this I’m going to propose to you?”

Under the pretence of speaking to us of private matters concerning his ship, he sunk his voice so low

that none, I think, but ears that listened as ours did could have heard what he said. By us not a word was lost.

“Now I know how it is with you, my lads. Your hearts are set on my little girl. I needn't tell you I have good reasons to know I could make a lady of her if I wished, and have a gentleman for my son-in-law as rich as the squire. That's neither here nor there. I'm rich enough, poor as I am, to let my child please herself. They say she's got an eye on one of you, and, for my part, I know I wouldn't swear to the contrary. I know she'll colour like a red sunrise when either of your names is named in her hearing; so I take it that one of you is pretty near to her heart, when, even at the mention of his brother, as well as of himself, her face tells such tales. As to which it is, the little jade is as close as the grave. Now, I ask you, boys, can I do fairer than say to you that if you both undertake this thing, and carry it through with all your might—both of you, I say, with all your might—I will not only promise my girl's hand to whichever can win her, but will also promise to the one that does win her a smart new cutter on his wedding? Now what d'ye say? Can each put his hand into the lottery and take his chance like a man?”

"We can, captain; we do!" I cried, grasping Andrew's hand, which was extended towards me. I felt fresh life within me; I felt for the moment, in the new courage which having something definite to hope for gave me, that I could even face failure bravely.

"Then we understand, captain," said Andrew aloud (I doubt if he could whisper), "we understand that Mistress Alice shall not be persuaded by you one way or the other?"

I saw that Alice heard, for when I glanced at her she was turning her head away hastily.

"Even as you say—just as you say," answered Flemming, looking at us searchingly to see whether we were not *now* satisfied.

Till that instant, I believe, we were as well satisfied as men in our plight could be; but when on Flemming's answer I looked up at Andrew's face, and beheld it turned towards Alice, and saw their eyes meeting with what appeared to me to be a look of deep trust and tenderness, all my new peace turned to rage, all my new hope to fierce suspicion. I did not betray myself; I did not let Andrew or Flemming suspect the change in me, but went on talking of the business in hand as if nothing had happened, and my intentions concerning it remained the same.

"Look you, lads, I can put it all clear before you," said Flemming. "You have out your little smack in the twinkling of an eye; your nets will fill on a night like this, everybody knows that; and you daredevils have stayed out till morning on many a worse. You go then—you two and that other Goliath there—bawling to one another about your nets and bait, and singing snatches of your herring chorus, till you are where no land-eye can spy you. Then, hey for Blackbeach!"

Blackbeach was a wretched little fishing village, a short distance from Hawkshold, but contained some large store caves belonging to our gang, and some armed men kept guard there every night. These caves were also the resort of about a dozen half-starved lads and men who haunted the place in hopes of being employed by us, as, indeed, they often were.

"There," continued Flemming, "you complete your crew—seven in all—then off for the cutter. You hoist your jib three times, and see that she does the like. Alongside you give the password and receive it. Then fall to loading your smack, silent and swift as lightning. Again to Blackbeach with you. Ask Jansen—you know him, the red-haired Dutchman—to open my secret cave for you. Unload, and put the goods

there; then off again, and back again as many times as needs be. Don't lose a shred of silk or a grain of tea if you can help it; it shall be the better for you."

"I'll be off with Junk and get the smack out," said Andrew, a little sickened by this burst of greediness.

I watched him as he went to the fire and shook Junk to wake him. When he had succeeded, and had got the giant on to his great bare feet, he half turned towards Alice, and said so timidly that I could but just hear him—

"Good-night to you, Mistress Alice."

I saw her downcast face raised slowly. I saw her sweet eyes go travelling up and up till they met his, waiting, watching, moistening for their coming.

"Good-night, Andrew," she said.

Then both snatched their eyes away and turned them down to the earth as if each said mutely to the other—"Thy love, or my grave."

Andrew and Junk went out. As I turned towards Flemming I saw that he had been watching me, and was suffering a little uneasiness at the expression he saw upon my face. It suited me to restrain myself no longer.

"Captain," I said, "it seems to me there is foul play betwixt us four."

"How now, Gideon? what are you at now?" he demanded testily.

"I am at this, captain. If my brother has stolen a march on me, as I see very plainly he has, your proposal of to-night is not fair."

"But this is foolery, Gideon; he has not stolen a march on you."

"I value my own opinion most on that matter, captain," I said.

Flemming then, with an oath between every word, swore to me that he had strong reasons to believe Alice did not care more for Andrew than for me, *if so much*.

Wretched comfort from such a man! But I took it to my soul, though I did not act upon it.

"The truth is, captain," said I, "I don't see enough to tempt me to venture on this job of yours."

He took his pebble snuff-box from his pocket, and raking it round with his black finger-nail, looked at me steadily.

"Come, Wolf," he said at last, "upon my soul I think I have not dealt exactly fair by you. It's true enough that, having in this to trust so much more to your sharp wits than to Andrew's strong hands, I ought to have let the balance be a little more on

your side than his. Well, as I would certainly rather have a clever fellow like you for my girl's husband than easy Andy—though he's a fine chap, I own—I don't mind promising you—in confidence, of course—that I'll put in a good word for you with Alice."

"That won't do, captain," I answered. "If Andrew has won the girl's liking—as I hold it that he has—and as I choose, in settling with you, to maintain that he has—the only thing to make all fair betwixt us will be for you to swear to do your utmost to help me to win Alice away from him to myself."

"Are you a very Wolf? Wouldst have me force my child?"

"Did I say force? Did I not say help me to win?"

"Then there's my hand on't, Wolf. I will do that much, if all the cargo's saved. I will, on the honour of a British sailor!"

As he once more gripped my hand, we heard my father muttering over the fire—

"Never thought much o' Flemming; sly dog, Flemming!"

A laugh burst from me, unmirthful and discordant enough, and I saw Alice bite her lip with displeasure.

"Poor old chap! don't know me yet," said Flemming.

"Oh yes, captain," answered I, taking down my fire-arms and Andrew's from the shelf over our bed, "he knows you marvellous well—as well as I do; and you shall see before sunset to-morrow how well *that* is."

"There's the lad for me!" he cried, slapping me on the back as I stood loading the fire-arms; and evidently he thought there was no deeper meaning in my words than that I intended showing my knowledge of him by saving his whole cargo. "Come, Alice, give a God-speed to the bravest free-trader in all Kent."

As he spoke, Flemming took his daughter's hand and held it towards me. I did not touch it, for I saw that she was troubled, and tried to draw it back. Of what strange inconsistencies was I made, that though I would fain have forced her to marry me, I dared not touch her hand against her will!

I looked at her fixedly as she stood trembling, troubled within herself that she could not find strength or words to speak to me in obedience to her father's command.

At last she said, in a voice that chilled me to the very heart—

“God speed you, Gideon, *in all good.*”

I gazed upon her with a bitterness that rose in hot drops to my eyes. “Is it like my little lady,” I said, “is it like her courtesy—her piety—to be so cold to one whose fate it is to be hers—whose love for her makes the gall of his sorrow or the sweetness of his joy?”

She moved her hand and her lips as if to hurriedly deny my charge, or to comfort me; but, unable to speak, she leaned upon the back of my father's chair, and turned her face from me.

This sight had a strange charm for me. It seemed so like the act of one who looked upon the old man with something of a daughter's love. I was melted and calmed. Raising the corner of her cloak, I pressed it to my lips, and left her.

When I got down to the beach, I found Andrew and Junk busy trimming the signal-lanterns in the old black shed where we kept the belongings of our smack.

I said the storm seemed over, but Andrew thought

it was but holding its breath, though he and Junk were agreed that it might very likely do so all night. The wind had changed, and only blew in sluggish, hot gusts. The clouds, in rolling off in heavy black masses to the east, showed the day-light not all gone, and there were red and watery grey streaks where the sun had set. The smack was at the water's edge, and Junk rolling between it and us, yelling, singing, and making as much noise as if the whole village were going a-fishing. I likewise worked with a *will*—I was going to write, *good will*. I *had* written it, but hastily did I blot out the word. It is well that I have. It is well, or how could I write here what thought, what resolution it was that made me work that night at fitting out the smack as delightedly, and sing and shout as loudly, as Junk himself? I hesitate. I say to myself, *Shall* I write it? Something within me of my old self cries to me to spare myself in *this*—to hide this only—*this* meanness, *this* humiliation—from the eyes of thy children, O my well beloved! I am puzzled, I confess, at my great unwillingness to make known this sin, which, though black enough, is pale beside those others which must be here told.

Ay, but I understand thee, Gideon. Those others she knew and suffered from, but *this* she knew not,

and thou would even hide this one spot from her children's children.

But while I sit hesitating and half inclined to yield to the beseeching of my heart, I remember that there are but two holy things lightening this otherwise dark history—truth and love; and once more taking up my pen—cast down in shame—I declare to myself I will let it lose no ray of either.

I confess then that the thought which made my heart light, my hand strong, and my brain keen and joyous that night, when I had left Flemming and had joined my brother and Junk on the beach, was nothing less base than a determination to obtain possession of, conceal, and keep the cargo of the cutter, to use as a means of forcing Flemming to keep his pledge to me.

Junk and I outdid each other in singing, laughing, and shouting. Andrew worked silently, and looked pale and grave; but I could see at times he too had hope “in his great, calm eyes,” hope of a different kind from mine—pure, patient, tender. I saw it, and laughed at it in my heart with bitter scorn.

At last all is ready—nets, bait, baskets, everything made the most of, and while we are locking the

shed door, Junk shows us our pains are not thrown away.

A man with a telescope under his arm is seen slowly descending the little white path round the sea corner of the cliff.

"We won't start yet," I whisper, unlocking the door again. "Let him pass her and take stock of her, and be satisfied; or, no, let's go in time to reach her just as he does, and meet him."

After waiting till the distance between him and the smack is only a little more than between the smack and us, we make for it with our lanterns, Junk rolling up his rags above his knees as we go, and swearing about having to go "hystering" (oystering) without bacca.

"Hearndean!" grunts Junk suddenly, and a few steps more shows us he is right. The man approaching the smack as we approach is Hearndean, the coast-guard who has stood our friend so often. But he has hung back lately, since the new inspector, Raglass, came. We must be on our guard with him.

We are close to the smack now, and putting our things into it, and he is within a dozen yards of us.

"What, off to-night, boys?" he shouts cheerily. "Well, it's a good night for fish. *But*," he adds, close

to my ear as he passes me, "*nothing else. For your lives, nothing else!*"

He has passed us, and we stand staring after him almost hearing our own hearts beat.

"I must be after him, and make him speak," I say, throwing down the lantern.

In an instant I am at his heels, shouting to him to know how many oysters Mrs. Hearndean will take of us to-morrow. Close up to his side, I take a bit of his sleeve between my finger and thumb, that I may hold him from escaping me, yet not be seen to touch him.

"Come, Hearndean, what's doing to-night?"

"Don't come on with me, Weir," he says, looking round him, fidgety and scared. "I've warned you, that's enough."

"No, it's not enough," I answer; "you've said too much, or too little, Hearndean."

"I've said all I shall say; it's your fault if the warning's not enough for you. Don't keep with me, Weir; don't try to ruin an old friend."

"Look you, Hearndean, I'll make it worth your while—you sha'n't repent it; only tell me, for life's sake, what game has Raglass on to-night?"

"I don't know what you mean; but if you don't leave me, look out for yourself, Weir."

I see there is nothing to be done with him, and mischief in trying to do anything. So I turn from him, shouting—"Then, why the devil did she say she'd have the oysters?"

I go back and report my failure.

Andrew looks troubled and stern. Junk's face lengthens alarmingly, and he stands looking with childish helplessness and faith from Andrew to me—from me to Andrew.

As it is never my custom to speak my thoughts aloud to Andrew, in any cases of perplexity like this, till I have myself decided as to how I shall act, I remain silent to-night for some minutes—perhaps two—perhaps three.

"What this most likely means," I say at last, "is that Raglass has got news of the cutter, and is on the watch—sea and shore. We must even take it that it is so. And while one of us goes in the smack with Junk to do the work, the other must keep watch ashore the night through, and signal the smack to keep out if needs be."

Andrew, always ready to trust himself blindfold

to my judgment, claps Junk on the shoulder, saying—

“Then go we, Junk; for I’d rather trust to his wits as a watch ashore than let him trust to mine.”

With his hands on the gunwale ready to leap into the smack, he paused to say cheerily—

“Come, captain, give the word!”

I am silent a moment, while my thoughts try to fit themselves to this new state of things.

If Andrew goes to the cutter and lands the cargo, and has it under his control, what becomes of all my plans?

“Hold!” I cry. “It seems to me that I must go with Junk, and you must stay.”

For once Andrew looks perplexed and discontented at my decision.

“Why so?” he remonstrates. “If I go, I can do twice as much as you; if I stay, I shall be little better than nothing, or may be worse than nothing, for if Raglass or his hounds get hold of me to put questions, sure as fate my tongue will blunder us all to ruin. If I might answer them with these”—clenching his hands—“well and good. But this is just a matter where your wits are wanted. You can spin a yarn,

and plan a hundred things in your head, while I should stand tongue-tied."

"You are mighty humble all at once, my brother," I say with a sneer, as if I did not know he would have so reasoned at any time; but my own dark thought has seen its shadow in *his* honest mind, and so it seems to me that the thought itself is there. "He also," I say to myself, "has his plans about Flemming and his smuggled treasures." But I will thwart him. "Andrew," I say sternly, "there has generally been but one master in our doings. Is there to be one now or two?"

"Gideon," he answers, with a look I have never before seen on his face, "I always did and I always shall, while we two are shipmates, obey any orders of yours that I understand to be right, or that I do not understand at all; but orders that, according to my gifts, I understand to be wrong, I don't give in to for you nor any man on sea or shore."

My suspicions now seem to be confirmed. Andrew, in spite of all this show of blunt honesty and obstinate conscientiousness, has the same thought I have had concerning the use of the cargo. I should, in my passion and bewilderment, charge him with his hypo-

crisy and villany, but that I fear to let him see what I too have intended.

While keeping back my anger and contempt, I look at his pale, determined face, till I fear that he, even he, slow as he is, has read in my eyes something of the reason of my reluctance to quit the smack, and my silent rage at being baffled. He looks at me sharply, searchingly, then hangs his head, as if some shame had fallen on him. Again he looks up, as he would fain shake it off and deny its existence. He puts his hands into one of the fish-baskets, and draws out a handful of straws.

"Come," says he, holding it out to me, "let this settle it. He that draws the shortest goes."

Junk watches breathless and open-mouthed, while I sullenly sign to Andrew to draw first. He draws. The straw is very short—a mere bit of four inches. I cannot hope that there is another shorter or as short in his hand. He holds it up with a smile, while Junk grunts with delight. I dash his hand down, crying with an oath that I will have no more of this mockery at such a time. Alarmed at what my loud voice may have done for us, Andrew hastily looks round. Another moment and he has leapt into the smack, and is crying to Junk—

"Push off! push off! I see the cutter. As for you, Gideon, follow your own conscience. I go to do my duty; and yours, before man and God, is to stay here and warn us of danger."

In vain I dash after the smack, and try to seize it. With the strength of six men, it is pushed by Junk, and in a moment he too has leapt in, and I see it mount the first heavy roller, then dance from wave to wave, while I stand wet to the neck.

For the first few minutes my mind was in a strange confusion. Admiration for Andrew's courage and decision was mingled with my jealousy and rage, and I doubted in my first bitter humiliation my ability to cope with him. But I had no time to stand still and study my own heart just then. In spite of the rage and disappointment I suffered, it was clear to me that I had no choice but to accept the post appointed. If I threw it up, and Andrew came through the business successfully, Alice was certainly lost to me. If I threw it up, and Andrew or the cargo came to harm, I should be held up as a traitor.

A moment's hesitation in mounting the cliff, and beginning my watch opposite Gideon's Rock, might verily bring upon me a charge of the blackest

treachery to my brother, and to the father of the girl I loved.

Comforting myself with the thought that I might yet get the cargo under my control before daylight, I determined it should go hard with me but what I would keep the smack and her freight safe from any danger from the coast. Fortunately, at Hearndean's warning and when I followed him, I had left my lantern and fire-arms on the stones, and they had not during our quarrel been noticed by either of us. By this time it was dark enough for me to mount to my watch-place without fear of being seen. I did so, and settled myself in a spot well-known to us, and where I had kept watch many a night for my father in the time when he was the boldest smuggler in Hawkshold. It was at a turn of the cliff, exactly before the rock from which I was named. I could not see it now, but could fix my eyes as directly towards it as if I saw it. By daylight it was visible at high tide as well as low; and had something of the look of a square church-tower, with one of its four ornaments remaining on the top, a spike like a finger pointing up. It was a fearful spot—more boats were dashed to pieces, more lives lost there, even in my time, than I can remember to count.

When I was a child, and had been hearing some fearful stories of this rock, I remember asking my mother why the Almighty let the finger of this dreadful rock point up to Him, and she answered—

“Who knows, my child? It may be that drowning men are reminded in their last agonies that, though their bodies are sinking, their souls are rising to that peaceful heaven the spike points up to.”

And I recollect that I took my brother's hand and said—

“If ever you or I are drowned there, Andrew, we will remember to look at the spike and think of this.”

It was a strange whim of my father's to call me after a thing which had nothing but sad and unlucky associations. The Gideon who had given it its name was a poor orphan sailor-boy, who had been sent home by his dying father to the care of two uncles—wild, half-savage men of Hawkshold, who were anything but pleased with such a charge, and used him cruelly. At last, when they were going on a cruise one night, and had got well out to sea, they pretended to the boy that he was too ill to go with them, and, putting him into a boat, bade him row ashore, telling him to row close by the left of the rock. The poor lad obeyed; and one of the men, who afterwards con-

fessed all, saw him and his little boat whirled round, and dashed against the rock. Since the uncle's confession, it had borne the murdered boy's name; and when two men of Hawkshold quarrelled it was a common thing to hear one say to the other, "Go to Gideon's Rock," meaning, "Go and kill yourself." The village children had picked up the saying, and used it in every little brawl; and strangers who might pass through the place without attending to their clamours for money would assuredly be pursued by the shrill cry of—

"Go to Gideon's Rock."

I had not been longer, I think, than half an hour in my watch-place on the cliff when I beheld what appeared to me the glistening of water some twelve or fifteen feet below where I was standing. I was puzzled; for there is never such a thing known as water to collect in any quantity on that side of the cliff. Taking it that the darkness of the night must be putting my eyes at fault, I closed them for a short space, then bending forward again, looked down. This time I also saw the glistening, but now it was no longer in the same spot where I had seen it before. It was farther westward of the cliff, that is to say,

farther from the village, and nearer to Blackbeach. It may be this fact gave my eyes fresh sight; for, on a sudden, my gleaming water divided into sharp, bright points, amidst which I could dimly discern heads of men. They were marching to Blackbeach. They would arrive there just as Andrew and Junk arrived with the first lot of the cutter's cargo. Who could have betrayed us? Had our quarrel been overheard, and so our plans for this night's work? Crouching, and more, I think, like a thing with wings than feet, I rushed headlong down the cliff, till I was even with them, and we were divided but by a few bushes. Here I clutched the grass to stop myself. To my wonder and fear they too stopped. Bathed in sweat, I lay flat on the grass, wondering if they had heard or seen me, and what would befall next.

I presently found they had but paused to divide and descend the hill separately; which I well understood their doing, as all together they would assuredly attract the attention of some of the fishermen living in the row of cottages at that side of the cliff—all off which fishermen were smugglers.

As I lay, scarce daring to breathe, I heard the bushes part, and then a footstep crackling the thorns but half a yard from me. It paused. I durst not

move an inch, for in parting the men seemed to surround me. But soon I heard a whisper behind the bushes, and made out the man in whose close neighbourhood I was had stood still to hearken to it, and he replied to it.

"Ay," he said. That was all; but that one little word was better to me then than a choir of music, for it was Hearndean's voice that uttered it.

He passed on, alone. Alone but for a few steps—for I never lost sound of his tread, but dragged myself after him almost on my hands and knees. I dared not rise; I dared not call him till I heard no other footsteps near us. Before he had an idea that any creature was near him on the wild part of the hill he was crossing, his weapon was snatched from him, and he was lying powerless under my grasp.

"Hearndean!"

"Wolf Weir! Are you going to kill me?" he asked.

"One question," I said: "did you betray us?"

"On my soul, no. They don't suspect you. They have heard something about a ship lying off Gideon's Rock waiting to be unladen. Weir, believe me and spare me!"

"Listen, Hearndean," I said. "I ask you to save

my brother's life. I will tell you how. Go straight to Raglass, and tell him you have met a country lad on the hill coming from Surgess Creek, and that you got from him that our smack was coming ashore there ten minutes since. This is what I ask you; this is what I could sell you your life for. But see, Wolf Weir scorns to treat a friend so. He sets you free; he helps you to rise; he gives you back your weapon, and then behold, on his knees, unarmed and helpless, he asks you to save his brother's life. We parted in bad blood, Hearndean. If he comes to harm in this night's work, life will be hell to me! Save him, Hearndean! Have mercy on us both, and save him!"

"If I don't, may I go to Gideon's Rock," said Hearndean with an oath which I think was not long unforgiven. "When the job is over, where does he come ashore?"

"As close to the rock as may be," I answered.

"Shall you be in the old watch-place?"

"I shall."

"Then if I cannot keep them off that part, as I will off Blackbeach, I will be talking loudly as we come; it is all the warning I can give you."

He went on his way and I on mine, back to my watch-place.

I was no sooner safely back than I began to feel a strange surprise at myself, and tried vainly to understand the great anxiety I had felt for Andrew's safety. Compared to that my care for the fate of the cutter had been slight.

I looked back on my fit of frantic fear about Andrew with a self-contempt from which I was relieved only by remembering that what I had done for him was precisely the best thing I could have done had I never thought of him at all, but of the success of our enterprise solely.

Somewhat consoled by this reflection, I lay down on the grass, close against the wall of cliff overhung by furze bushes and brambles, and by way of passing the time set myself to follow in my imagination the progress of Andrew and Junk.

Now, I thought, they are just within hail of Blackbeach with the first load.

They signal to know if all's well, and they may come ashore.

As there is always some smuggling business going on in connection with Blackbeach, they keep a watch there all night, on the look-out for such signals.

My thoughts keep so greedily close to Flemming's precious cargo, that I fancy that I am actually and

verily in the smack with this part of it, that I see Andrew lift his lantern, wave it, draw it back, then lift and wave it again, then hide it and wait.

Looking to Blackbeach, I imagine that I see the answer, the safe signal—the one wave of the light—but here my thoughts grow confused, for in spite of my persistently assuring myself of the one, the *three*—the signal of danger—*will* dance and wave before my eyes.

But I make my mind believe in the *one*, and see the smack come ashore, and the bare-legged lads run out from the cottages to help.

Junk stays to keep them in order as they bear the goods up the beach, where the cart waits to take them to the cave; and Andrew makes his way to Carl Jansen, the Dutchman, who has lived in a cave here twelve years of his life, and whom Andrew doubtless finds but just sober enough to understand Flemming's commands.

I fancy now Andrew and Junk passing in and out through the large cave to Flemming's secret store-place. I see their tall forms bent under their rich burdens, and the men lying and sitting round, the Dutchman turning after them indolent, covetous eyes, the ragged boys officiously lighting them with their

glaring torches; and I see Carl Jansen himself, looking jovially round at his children, as he calls them, while he sits in their midst on a barrel—his vivid red hair, vivid blue eyes, and vivid white teeth, the only bright colours in the sombre place. I see his huge pewter mug, rested on one knee, while on the other his hand keeps time to the gay little song he is singing with such irresistible spirit that the boys lighting Andrew and Junk cannot keep their feet still, and even Junk's long legs cut a few ungainly capers behind his master's back.

Somehow the lively tune has bewitched my own mind, which begins to show me the cave in a state of strange confusion. Everybody and everything there is drawn into the dance. I see also Alice's little feet there, and hear the thump-thump of Flemming's wooden leg. Hearndean's amiable pale face is there, and Raglass, too, is dancing round the Dutchman with wild enjoyment.

It seems to me that I hear some terrible sounds, but half-smothered by the gay voice of the Dutchman. Yes, I hear groans, stifled but heavy, and deep-muttered threats of vengeance. Suddenly the torches die out, the dancing ceases, the hot, impure air of the cave is gone.

Now I am out on the beach again, where Raglass and his men have seized on Andrew and Junk, and their ragged assistants; and where a desperate fight is going on. Andrew is shot, and is falling dead in the boat, and Hearndean is struck down by a blow from Junk's oar,—when I wake from my wild dreams with savage maledictions of myself for having fallen asleep in my watch-place.

But what is this? Now, even now that I am fully awake, and the fresh breeze from the sea is on my face, I hear still the smothered groans I heard in my sleep.

Leaning upon my hands, and straining my eyes against the darkness, I at first can see nothing, but I hear the tramp of feet only a few yards before me.

I hear many feet, some falling in a heavy, monotonous march, others dragging themselves along in irregular, painful paces, all hurrying on as if pursued, and delay were death.

At last I distinguish forms. I see two men just before me, carrying another between them.

I hear them muttering as they pass—

“He is cold, mate, his hands are like stone.”

“Ay, but a fire and a draught of brandy 'll soon warm his blood again.”

"He strikes a chill through my very marrer, mate. By all above us, I believe my lad's dead!"

"No, no; not he, mate. Bear up, or we'll never get him home."

I listen after them, and when they are some way down the hill I hear a sudden stop and a cry of—

"He *is* dead! My lad is dead!"

I knew the voices. I recognised each form now of the dismal procession as it passed me, and I knew, too, the meaning of every broken sentence that I heard.

They are the men who went from Hawkshold this morning, full of strength and daring, and confident of success.

They have been betrayed by one of themselves into the hands of the revenue officers, their cargoes seized, some of their men thrown into prison, three or four of them have been killed, and they are hurrying home, burthened not with new wealth, but with their dead and wounded.

Echoing in my heart the threats of vengeance, which make the muffled music to this march of defeat and death, I watch till they have all passed by me, and voices and footsteps have died away.

When I am alone I find that the procession has

left a gloom and bitterness upon me that for some time I strive against vainly.

I, like them, can find no comfort save in plans of vengeance, and these do at last take the chill from my blood and bring me hope and courage.

I promise myself that when I am married to Alice, and have my cutter and all Flemming's influence, I will restore to Hawkshold all its lost glory, and make it the terror of the law.

While thinking of these things my eyes are turning incessantly towards Gideon's Rock, beyond which I shall see Andrew's signal hours hence, when his work is done, and he desires to know if the coast is clear that he may come ashore, or where I should see it if any danger drove him in before the business was finished.

Weary of walking up and down against the wall of the cliff, I seat myself on the ground, and no sooner do I again turn my eyes to the rock than I see a light swung in the darkness once—twice.

Andrew is in danger, then. He can have been but once to Blackbeach; and he is obliged to leave his work but barely begun.

Shall I show him the safe signal? Dare I, till I

have been down to the beach to see that all is clear there?

While I hesitate, I see some one else answering his signal. In the pathway below me, a lantern is shown and waved once, and its light reveals to me a group of men armed with cutlasses and pistols.

What shall I do? If I wave the danger signal, I bring them instantly upon me, and shall be powerless to send help to Andrew, who is thus beset both by sea and by land.

A voice—Hearndean's—says loudly—

“We are scarce high enough for it to be seen.”

“Hold your tongue!” muttered the voice of Raglass, evidently enraged by Hearndean's loud tone.

They now begin to descend the cliff, not following the path, but going by a way that will take them to the beach in three or four minutes.

And now, the first instant that I dare judge it safe, I answer Andrew's signal by the warning—three waves of my lantern.

He should show that he sees this by showing his once. But I look in vain for this reply; all is darkness.

What can it mean? What can they be thinking of to cease watching, as they must have done?

Again I signal, and this time I am answered instantly.

Andrew is warned, and is again putting out to sea. Now for a whole hour all is darkness at sea; all silence ashore.

It is an hour in which I seem to live a year.

What danger can Andrew have met with at sea, or at Blackbeach, which drove him in so soon? Is he exposed to that danger now while waiting for me to signal when he may come in?

Another fear is on me. Suppose he ventures in without risking another signal to me, and Raglass is waiting below still on the watch?

Thus I sit tortured with anxiety and suspense, and knowing not what to do.

If I stay where I am, I cannot tell *how* to answer him should he signal. If I go below, I cannot signal at all.

At last, finding it impossible to bear this suspense and inactivity any longer, I descend as far down as I dare hope a signal might be unseen by any one upon the beach—if I have to show it.

Even so much nearer the beach as this is than my old watch-place, I find all so perfectly quiet that I be-

gin to feel confident that Raglass and his men have gone away—perhaps have given up the game, or gone farther along the beach to explore.

Suddenly it comes—the well-known sound of the grating of the smack against the shingle.

In an instant there is a rush of men down the beach to meet it, and the sudden flare of torches and lanterns show it me distinctly, the two huge figures in it, and Raglass and his men rushing through the water to meet them.

Now Raglass has his hand on the gunwale and shouts to them to surrender.

But Junk—a giant to some purpose now—has actually pushed off the smack again, while Andrew strikes at the hand on the gunwale with his pistol.

That hand is withdrawn, but the other avenges it.

“Your blood be on your own head!” shouts Raglass, and fires, with what result I cannot see; but I see and hear his shot returned, and I see him fall into the arms of Hearndean, while the smack vanishes into the darkness.

For some moments I cannot move or have any control over my thoughts, and still I hear by the groans of Raglass that his wound is dangerous.

I shiver with abhorrence of myself for thinking

that Andrew may be obliged to fly the country to save his life.

In the revulsion of feeling which this thought brings, I try to ask myself almost with a prayer what I can do for his safety.

Then I remember that I must no longer risk my being seen here to-night, as that would be fatal to him.

They have not yet recognised him, I can hear that by the exclamations of Raglass, who keeps urging on his men, as they try to lift him, to discover the murderous thief's name to-morrow, and hints about getting a notice out, that a hundred pounds reward shall be given for his capture.

Making my way up the hill swiftly and quietly as I can, I run by a pathless desolate way till I am at the back of the village.

A few minutes more and I am lying on my bed at home, ready to swear, if any inquirers come, that Andrew and Junk are out in the smack fishing, and that it's almost time they were in.

As soon as it was daylight I rose, impatient to run to the beach, and see if the smack was visible.

I found my mother already up, and gone to help

and console such of her neighbours as had suffered from the Folkestone expedition.

My father was still asleep in the small inner room.

I had but just left the house, and was closing the door gently behind me, when, looking along the street seawards, I saw Andrew coming.

I was not superstitious, or I should have thought it was his ghost.

He was white and weary, and came towards me leaning against the wall, and looking scarcely able to drag his limbs along.

One arm was folded closely across his chest; and when, as if in sudden need of more support, he stopped to touch the wall, I saw that the bosom of his blue serge shirt was stained with blood.

As he came towards me his eyes were cast down, but he was no sooner aware that I stood at the door than he fastened upon me such a look as I shall never forget; though I was *then* guiltless of wronging him save in my thoughts.

This knowledge caused me to return his look boldly, though I was filled with an awe and pity I cannot express, as I opened the door and moved aside for him to enter.

He sank exhausted on the stool beside my mother's spinning-wheel, on which he leant his elbow.

I saw his haggard eyes turning about in hope that she might come to him; and I saw also that they endeavoured to avoid me as if I had been some wild beast revolting to his sight.

"Let me look at your wound," I said, advancing towards him.

"Stand back!" he cried, throwing out his hand with such a gesture of command as held my feet still, in spite of me; then sinking his head upon his breast in pain from the sudden movement, he added bitterly—

"'Tis not enough to satisfy *you*!"

"Andrew," I said, in sullen grief, "I have had a vile night of it; and, on my soul, I have done my best for you. I know not for what you blame me."

He looked up at me with eyes that appeared sick with contempt.

"You did your best, did you not," he replied, "in giving me no warning of the welcome Raglass had prepared for me under your very eyes? Yes, your best for my destruction!"

"You may mock me as you will," I said. "One must take all one gets from a wounded man; but I throw your sneer back in your teeth. I did my best.

How did I know but what it might ruin us if I kept on signalling danger? If you thought not, why didn't you signal first for news?"

"You do not ask me such a question as that with a clear conscience, Gideon. You are no fool. You must see fast enough that a signal from me would, if *they* were there, tell them all they wanted to know."

I felt his unjust suspicion most cruelly; but I saw no use in reasoning with him just then; for Andrew was one of those obstinately simple honest men, who, if they once have their belief in one they have trusted shaken, regard it as a kind of madness ever to trust in the same man again.

So I saw that since my secret intention concerning the disposal of the cargo had been discovered by him, I had appeared to him nothing less than utterly dishonourable and corrupt.

"Keep your suspicious till you are tired of them, if you like," I said again, approaching him; "but, at least, let me see to your wound."

"Let me alone, I tell you! The wound is nothing but a graze on the side. I want no help."

"Then how came you like a ghost, and scarce able to walk, if it is nothing?"

He looked at me with eyes flashing with triumph, and answered—

“Because I have saved Flemming’s cargo since I had it; and as his bales were heavy, have lost much blood.”

At first I thought he must be raving; but he lowered his eyelids with such a quiet scorn for my disbelief, that I knew not how either to doubt or credit his words.

In my perplexity, I could not forbear questioning him, though he answered me with increasing reluctance and contempt.

“You did not go ashore at Blackbeach at all, did you?”

“No, I did not.”

“They showed the three lights?”

“Yes, they did.”

“Did you go back and try again?”

“I went back no more.”

“Yet you have taken the cutter’s cargo?”

“I have.”

“And the cutter has gone off empty and unsuspected?”

“She has.”

“And the goods?”

“What of them?”

"Where are they?"

He raised his head, and looked at me with quiet, almost untroubled contempt, and replied—

"Where they can be made no foul use of."

"Hypocrite!" I cried. "How do I know that?"

He raised his arm, and pointed to the bed we shared.

"You may know it, if you like," he said, "by looking back to the time we lay there babes, and asking thyself if thy brother has ever acted like a villain."

"Andrew!" I cried out, approaching him with I know not what threats in my face and gestures; "upon my soul you will be acting like one now if you drive me desperate. I *will* know what you have done with the cargo, or——"

"Or what? You will strike me? Well, you have the advantage of me in strength for once in your life."

"No; may my hand drop off if I touch you, Andrew; but do not try to send me mad, or how can I answer for what I say or do? Tell me, Andrew, tell me, thou wouldst not be so great a—I mean, couldst not find it in thee to take the giving up of all the goods all upon thyself, when I tell thee I have done my best for thee and the cutter's safety. Ask Hearn-dean if I did not demean myself by going on my

knees to beg him to spare thee. I swear it seems to me I have lived ten years in this night!"

I stopped speaking, for he was leaning so heavily on the spinning-wheel, I thought he would break it and fall.

I thought as he drew a deep heavy breath and passed his hand for a moment before his eyes, his obstinacy was a little softening, and encouraged by this fancy, I cried to him with redoubled earnestness—

"Come, Andrew, would *she* think it fair in thee to give me no chance at all? Let all be as Flemming first said. Let us give up the goods together, claiming an equal share in saving them."

"Equal!" he cried, with an anger and scorn that made my hope die, and rekindled all the smouldering rage in me. "What hast *thou* done to weigh against my blood?"

Seeing him falling half lifeless against the wheel, I put out my arm, though my eyes looked at him vengefully, to save him; but staying himself by throwing one arm over the wheel, he waved me off with the other, saying—

"I tell thee I want not thy help."

"And I," I cried, losing all power over myself, "I

tell thee I will have my share of the cargo. Where is it?"

He looked at me as I stood over him, pale with passion; he looked at me with his large haggard eyes long and scornfully, and answered me with the time-worn insult of the place—"Go to Gideon's Rock."

Coming from him at such a time and after such a question, the mockery had a venom which entered into my veins, and half-maddened me.

I stood over him for a moment, speechless, my clenched hands raised, then dashing them together, I turned and fled from the house.

I lay on the beach, with the nets in my hand pretending to mend them.

I had lain there about an hour trying to think, but my mad rage and hatred ran through and through my brain in too violent a tide to be stayed and formed into thoughts.

Junk had been near me, busy with the smack.

Anxiety for his master's safety had sharpened his wits, and had inspired him to go to Surgess Creek, and make a secret bargain for a net of fish, which he had been ostentatiously sorting and selling on the

beach near me, grumbling to everybody over our bad night's luck.

By this time the losses and sufferings from the Folkestone expedition had thrown the whole village into a state of gloom, rage, and terror impossible to describe.

Small curiosity was felt concerning the little affray in which Raglass had received his wound. I heard often a certain dull, incomplete satisfaction expressed that he *was* wounded, but I heard more frequently bitter anathemas on his antagonist for not having done his work better.

Raglass himself at least was not too much intoxicated with triumph at the Folkestone defeat, to make arrangements for the discovery of the man who had returned his shot with such unpleasant and perhaps fatal results.

From what I could understand from the gossip going on around me, it seemed that the bullet had entered his arm just below the shoulder, and that delay in getting a surgeon to extract it had put his life in great danger.

He had already caused written notices to be put up in the village stating that a hundred pounds reward was offered for the apprehension of the smuggler who

had attacked him, and a free pardon to any of his accomplices who should assist in delivering him up to justice.

The suspicions of Raglass had, for reasons known to himself, fallen upon a smuggler named Halkit, and ever since daylight three men had been seeking him with a warrant for his arrest.

Fortunately, Halkit was at this time at Boulogne, as every one but the Custom-House people knew.

All this I learnt from the buzz of gossips round me as I lay on the beach fingering the nets.

I heard from Junk that Andrew had sent word by him to Flemming of the safety of the cargo, and of his wound which would instantly bring suspicion on him if the Custom-House people got to know of it; and that therefore he would wait at home till he was sufficiently rested to show no signs of it, and would at the first moment he judged it safe come to Flemming with all particulars.

I writhed upon the beach and dashed my hand into the stones as I thought of the triumph he was anticipating, of the joy with which he was looking forward to standing before Flemming and Alice alone with his success.

I could not rid myself wheresoever I turned my

eyes,—I could not rid myself of the picture of the wounded giant standing before Alice with his pale face, his modest account of his gallant night's work, his silent but all-powerful entreaty for his reward.

"Shall it be?" I asked myself. "Shall this meeting take place, and so all my hopes be sent to wreck and ruin?"

I lay supporting myself on my elbows, my fingers idly busy with the nets, my eyes fixed on the black shed-door, finding the hated picture there, as well as everywhere else. I was gazing on it with the spirit of Cain within me when something was put between it and me.

This was one of the notices of the reward offered for the discovery of the man who had wounded Raglass.

Junk, with an air of perfect innocence, placed himself before the notice, and made the man who was putting it up spell it out to him.

"A hundred pounds!" the poor fellow repeated, looking aghast at me as the man went away.

"Ay, Junk," I said, with a laugh that made him move quickly on one side, and stare at me, "only think—a hundred pounds! Why, 'tis enough to make a poor wretch like thee play Judas."

"Judas!" he repeated, shaking his head as he backed away from me. "Nay, that's a game that ain't played at for money only."

When the time at last drew nigh for Andrew's visit to Flemming—when I had seen Junk go off to assist him to rise and put on his clothes, I could no longer remain still as I had remained so long, holding myself by force out of harm's way.

I rose, and, going to the churchyard, stood there behind a gravestone watching our home, that I might see Andrew come forth.

At last he came, and turned up the street towards Flemming's cottage, Junk and my mother putting out their heads to look proudly after him.

From the glimpse I caught of his face, I think it was still deadly pale; but he held his head as erect and walked as boldly as the soundest giant that ever lived.

Yet there was that in his path which might make his courage fail him.

At the end of the street the old squire and magistrate was standing, leaning on his gold-headed cane, waiting to speak to the three men who had been seeking Halkit, and who were now just turning

out of an alley leading from the back part of the village.

They all turned and looked at Andrew, who passed without faltering in his pace, and turned boldly and leisurely into Flemming's garden-gate.

I thought the old gentleman looked at him with some interest, as if he remembered the time when he used to teach his boys to row, and manage a sailing-boat; but I think he now hardly knew either of us by sight. The three men were strangers Raglass had just hired—the *only* three, it was said, whom he could entirely trust.

I therefore had no fear of passing them, and I was possessed by an irresistible desire to see Andrew received by Alice and her father.

I left the churchyard, and walked quickly up the street till I passed the men and stood close by Flemming's cottage.

I beheld the great figure turned sideways towards me, slightly bending to fit itself to the little doorway where Alice had met it, and where she was looking up at him with smiling lips and tearful eyes, all questioning him at once about his wound.

How came I to have crossed the road? How came I to be standing close to the group of men I had just

been so anxious to pass by unnoticed? why was I mute when I reached them?

"What is it he is trying to say? Who is he?" asked the magistrate.

I tried again to speak; and this time my voice came thick and hoarse enough as I lifted my arm and pointed to the figure in Flemming's doorway.

"There is your man! There is the man who shot Raglass! I saw him."

I remember the different expressions of excitement on each of the four faces, which just sufficed to show me I had verily done the thing and not dreamed it. I remember just this, and afterwards nothing for some minutes but a sense of giddy expectancy—a waiting for some crash—some change through all creation which it seemed to me must come after such an outrage against nature as I had just committed.

The silence—the lull before what my cowering soul awaited came—was truly awful.

In it I saw one of the men go away, and quickly return with two more carrying chains.

The five of them went in together to seize the giant, and all came out with him erect in their midst, Alice following, clinging to her father in terror.

He stood like a statue of stone, while they put the chains about his hands and feet.

His back was towards me.

"Who is it has informed against me?" he asked at last.

At this the man who was fastening the chains on his hands, and whom he had spoken to, glanced uneasily at me without answering. Another saw his look, and at once understood me to be the informer.

Now this man knew us both, and he no sooner cast his eyes towards me than he cried out—

"He! Why, he is his brother."

Andrew immediately turned himself and saw me.

Like some mean, crawling creature, terror-stricken, yet fascinated by the eyes of a lion, I lifted my abased head and met his look, as he said, in a quiet, almost gentle tone—

"Yes, it is my brother."

Then I heard the cry of Alice as she too understood the truth, and I felt her look, though I dared not see it.

I knew that many were crowding to the spot. I knew that my mother was flying along the street, her distaff in her hand, her flax streaming behind her, but

I saw nothing clearly but the giant in his chains, his grand face more full of love than sorrow as he looked down at Alice lying prostrate on the ground, her lips and hands on the chains about his feet.

PART II.

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THE gaol of the parish to which Hawkshold belonged was at a large seaport town.

I shall not give the name of that town.

I know not where the lots of those for whom I write may be cast, and I would not, by my sad story, risk throwing a shadow on walls that may be sheltering them, or streets their feet may have to tread.

The gaol was on a cliff at a great distance above the sea, and not far from the ruins of a castle.

It was a plain, narrow building, with four grated windows to each story; two looking landwards into the deep valley, and two seawards.

Beneath it a large expanse of the shore is black with rocks, low and jagged, and covered with a treacherous slime.

As a child I have played amongst those rocks, when I have been taken to the town by my mother to buy boots or tackle at the market.

I have roamed amongst them, and gathered my

hat full of fish from them, and have sat down with another child by my side to look up fearfully at the great white gaol on the cliff.

I remember times when we have sat till twilight imagining ourselves in there, and planning escapes, till our mother has called us to begin our long walk homeward; and even on that walk we have still whispered of the gaol on the cliff, and afterwards have dreamed of it upon our bed at home.

Sometimes we would wake from such dreams in affright and trembling, but clasping each other's hand fast would soon again be sleeping tranquilly.

The night had come—the night of that day of which I have last written.

I had again come to the old town. I was again sitting among the rocks, and looking at the gaol on the cliff.

And the child who used to sit here with me—the feet which followed mine untiringly in and out among the rocks—the hands that gathered fish which they were obliged to drop to hold by me for support—are they not still here with me? Can I not feel the sleepy form pressing against me as I sit and stare up at the gaol?

Oh, let it be so! Mother, mother, call thy chil-

dren to come home with thee! The night grows dark and we are weary, and one of us has slept and dreamed a fearful dream!

Oh, let me hear thy voice calling to us across the sands from the market-place — "Gideon! Andrew! come, children, come; 'tis late, and your father will be home, and find the hearth fireless, and the table unspread."

Where is thy hand, my brother? Come, let me grasp it, and run with thee to her side, and we will go through the busy streets with her, and hear her cheerful "Good night, neighbour," to the townsfolk as we go. Clinging to her skirts, we will not fear the dark, fresh night, but running merrily to keep up with her step, cross all the windy hills that lie betwixt us and dear, dear home.

Where is thy hand, my brother? I am weary of these rocks, and, see, the moon has risen on the castle ruins, and the gaol is grim and ghastly in her light. She shines upon the grated windows, from which I cannot withdraw my eyes, though as I look my flesh creeps with the fear of beholding some pale familiar face gazing down at me.

Where is thy hand, my brother? Oh, let us hasten, we have never stayed so late!

There is water creeping in amongst the rocks; the tide is rising. Oh, misery! It tells me of the many tides which have ebbed and flowed since those my childhood's happy days. It tells me that the little comrade who made their happiness, and for the touch of whose warm hand I yearn, I weary, now lies bleeding, chained, in certainty of a fearful death in that very gaol he feared so much.

Dost find it dreadful as we did imagine it, my brother? Art thou cold, and does thy wound smart, and do thy chains chafe thee, pale giant?

But though the bare stones be thy bed, and death thy vision, though thy wound rage, and thy chains eat into thy flesh, yet is thy state even as a king in his palace compared with that of him who sits among the rocks and looks up at thy prison walls.

When would it come—that change, that crash, that sudden, awful vengeance which my soul had been awaiting, expecting, from the instant when the words of betrayal were spoken?

When would it come? The night was half spent. As I roamed among the rocks, and on the cliffs, I sometimes stopped with a sense of sudden horror at the thought—does it take so long for what passes

upon earth to be known in heaven? Has the cry of Alice, the shriek of my mother, not yet reached the ear of Him who says, "Vengeance is mine?"

There were moments in that night when the sense of the sword of vengeance hanging over me so scathed my soul that I was moved to lift my eyes to heaven, and baring my breast, cry humbly for the stroke to descend upon me then and there.

But the fresh winds touched me gently as I stood so, and the stars looked never more full of peace, the sea also kept its fresh glad voice, which seemed to me to sing—"What knoweth man of thy mysteries, thou Lord God Almighty!"

The moon waned; and before the dawn came there was utter darkness, in which I wandered on the verge of those cliffs which I have seen many shudder to climb and look from in the daylight.

But a spell was on *my* footsteps. I stumbled not. I fell into no danger. Wherever I wandered, wherever I cast me down, my heart still beat with all the fullness of strong life.

The dawn came, and still His wrath had not descended upon me.

I was now moved to go down and sit among the rocks, that I might look up at the gaol windows and

employ my mind in wondering through which of them the light of His bitter day was wakening my brother. Hardly had I set foot in the town when I noticed a strange turmoil there. Shopkeepers were leaving their shutters half taken down, or thrown across the path or the threshold of their doors, and were running down the street in the same direction in which every one else about at this early hour was likewise hastening. Market girls and men were running with their baskets on their heads to the beach wall to look after people as they went hurrying across the sands.

At last I saw that they were going towards the rocks under the gaol, and that a crowd had already gathered there.

Now as I drew near to them the faces and attitudes of these people became to me more terrible than the writing on the walls of Belshazzar.

I saw a young market girl sinking in a dead swoon in an old fishwife's arms, her basket of apples overturned at her feet.

Looking upon her and many others, I knew in an instant that the suspended blow had fallen upon me.

Pushing my way into their midst, I beheld that which they had come out to look on, and anguish

and horror rushing upon my heart as with the teeth of tigers, I lifted up my voice and rent the air with my cries.

Time and tides have washed out that picture on the rocks. I will not try to see or to show it; I will not tell the story with that day's horror fresh upon it; I will tell it only as I have heard it whispered in the town after many days.

Perchance a fresh ship is in the harbour; and fresh eyes see, what all eyes in the good town are weary of, the lonely figure on the rocks. Perhaps some curiosity is expressed, and then the voice will be sunk, the finger lifted, and the story told.

His story—the most fearful of all those legends of the gaol which had once filled him with such awe—the story of the young fisher of Hawkshold, who was betrayed by his brother, and whose heart, unable to sustain the prospect of certain and disgraceful death, and of witnessing and letting his old father and mother, and the girl they both loved, witness his brother's evidence in public court bringing on this death—whose tender heart, unable to sustain this prospect, was helped out too effectually by his herculean arms,

which tore away the grating from his prison window, whence he cast himself upon the rocks below.

"Since I must die, my brother, be my death on my own head, and not on thine!" Was he thus generous—even to deadly sin? Did he forget, or did he know too well the double crime he brought on me—not only the ruin of that grand image of his Maker, but the ruin likewise of the pure and goodly soul that dwelt there?

I know not why; but in spite of all the years I mused over it, this thing became more inexplicable to me than to others. Perhaps it was because none knew so well as I the simplicity and strength of that outraged spirit; perhaps it was on this account that its fall appeared more marvellous to me than to those who loved it more, but knew it less. I cannot tell; but I know that I could never fully believe in the reasons they assigned to him for this deed.

I believed then firmly that he reasoned not at all, but did what he did in an excess of anguish and despair.

I have heard it said in that town—though I myself have no knowledge of the thing happening—I have heard it said that a being more like a maniac than a man in grief, haunted the place where they laid the

crushed remains before consigning them to the earth. That, sitting before the door, with his arms clasped round his knees, he gnashed his teeth at those who would come near, and that when one Alice Flemming came from Hawkshold to kiss the coffin that held her lover, this guardian of the dead-house signed her to begone, saying words like these—

“What wouldst thou see, Alice—his face? Go, child, and remember him in his pride; but come no more to look on him. His face is gone. God loved it so, He bade his spirit come before Him with no other, and 'tis gone.”

And of a truth, no earthly face was left upon the form so awfully disfigured.

Raglass made a faint effort to have the body treated as a criminal's, and buried in the gaol yard; but all the village rose up in appeal against it, and succeeded in getting permission to bury it on the hill sheltering his home.

I heard—for I myself took heed of nothing—I heard that poor Junk was not present at the funeral, but that at his master's arrest he had been seized with fear, and had fled to save his own life.

But many others with less affection, but with stronger brains than poor Junk, risked their lives to be

present at the burial on the hill; and the squire's sons an illustrious statesman and two gallant officers, were also there to see lowered the great coffin that held the humble friend of their boyhood—the simple giant who had borne them on his back, and used his strength for their childish amusement.

Thus, rough, homeless heads, on which a price was set, and heads crowned with honours, were bent together over that “unconsecrated” grave.

For many days the world was not with me. I lived apart from it in my misery as in a cloud.

For many days I remembered not the anguish of the father and mother I had bereaved, nor the sorrow of her who had buried with the dead the sweet bloom of her youth.

I thought not of them; I was alone with myself, my brother, and my God.

For days I never hungered nor thirsted, nor felt the need of sleep; neither did I any manner of work.

Remorse was my food and my drink, my pillow and my book.

Sometimes I saw from afar off the light of the hearth I had made desolate; and at last I remembered as I beheld it, that perchance my great suffering might

be somewhat assuaged if I could find courage to cast myself upon the mercy of my father and my mother.

I doubted much if I were justified before my offended God in seeking such relief; but their suffering, deep as I knew it to be, appeared to me so slight in comparison with my own, that I did *not* doubt they would receive and comfort me when I should venture to appear before them.

For a long time I refrained from going, tearing myself away when my eyes fed too greedily upon that little light from the window of my home.

For a long time my spirit was deaf to the cries of my flesh for rest and succour; but when at last it heard and regarded them, it likewise lifted up its voice, crying, "I, too—I must have comfort, or go mad."

So I submitted, and went home.

It was on a misty winter's afternoon that I approached Hawkshold by the sands, and for the first time since the death of Andrew entered into the village.

By this time my clothes hung upon me in rags, my feet were bare and bleeding.

As I drew near the old black cottage my heart leapt within me when I beheld my father sitting at the door to comfort himself in the warmth of the sunset.

He saw me. He knew me, and began to tremble.

I ran to him, but when I would have fallen at his feet he suddenly rose and tottered into the house, and shut the door in my face with a strength I could not have believed that he possessed.

As I stood amazed and with a sense of some new misery creeping into my heart, I heard my mother inquiring tenderly of the old man as to what had alarmed him; and I heard him answer by uttering my name—his voice trembling with terror and abhorrence—

“Gideon! Gideon! Gideon!”

“No,” cried my mother in a whisper wherein I could discern no anger; “thou sayst not so!”

I allowed my finger, which had stolen to the latch, to press it softly down, and pushing the door some little way, said—

“Mother, it is I!”

I then heard nothing but a feeble cry to God from my mother, and opening the door looked in.

I saw the two aged and feeble forms clinging together, and gazing towards me with eyes full of a horror that made my soul faint within me.

As I stood as one paralysed, my father began to wail in a low, shuddering voice, and my mother drawing him closer to her breast said in a whisper—

“Hush! dear heart, hush! The Lord is with us.

He will guard us. O sure He will smite him if he dares come nearer."

Silent I looked upon them, silent I turned and went away.

Scarcely had I crossed the threshold when I heard my mother fly to the door, and closing it dash the bar across it.

It was then that all endurance forsook me utterly, and throwing up my arms against the little door, I pressed to it in bursting impotent passion and wept aloud.

I now found myself in a more utterly forlorn condition than I could till then have believed possible to fall to the lot of mortal man.

Even my remorse, which God knows was never absent from me, had ceased to absorb me, but like a strong drink which at first intoxicates, then, with constant use, takes no apparent effect, it left my senses fully awake to outward things.

I could feel to the very core of my heart the disgust that was excited in the village when my return was known.

For I did not leave it when the door of the house where I was born had been closed upon me. I think

I was possessed by a curiosity half morbid, half yearning to know how much I was hated, or as I taught myself to reason, how much Andrew was loved.

I saw that men went out of their way to avoid crossing my shadow as it lay along the ground. I saw that women snatched their children up if they chanced to be playing in the road as I was coming, and that they themselves turned their faces from me as from something inhumanly hideous.

For the first day not a murmur passed from my spirit. No sign of hatred or disgust could waken resentment in me. I looked around me and saw these things, and learned patiently to know what I was in the world's eyes.

But when at night I sat hungry and homeless by my brother's grave, I wondered if it appeared as strange to God as to a wretch like me that men should lavish such love on one who was safe in his Saviour's bosom, while on me, the crown of whose head was scarce above the Slough of Despond, they set the iron heel of hatred to keep me down.

I asked in no bitterness. I only wondered patiently as I looked up at the peaceful stars.

The next morning, lest my soul should appear before God ere He Himself summoned it, I bethought

myself that I must do something to sustain the fainting life within me.

For many days my food had indeed been scant. I think I had but three times in seven days tasted bread; but of this I am not sure, for the little market girl who had swooned when *his* body was found upon the rocks was so moved with pity on hearing the whole story that she often brought me her little meal in her handkerchief, entreating me to eat, and when she wearied me and I frightened her with my threats, she laid food in my path, and it may be that at times I fell upon it and devoured it unknown to myself—I cannot tell.

Some hours before daylight, therefore, I left my cold bed upon the hill, and went down to the shed where we used to keep the smack and a smaller boat.

I found all as it was. Poor Junk had tidied the place and left everything in order before his panic had come upon him.

I took the small boat and one of the nets and went out fishing.

Others were out, and some of them came in when I did, and the people came down to the beach to see **our** luck and to buy.

It happened that I who had been out the shortest

time was the most fortunate. My haul was the largest on the beach.

It remained so. None bought of me.

The scarce and dear fish sold quickly. Mine, that was plentiful and cheap, remained untouched, unlooked at, and all passed it by with averted faces, as if its odour was vile in their nostrils.

When I was alone I ran and shut myself in the shed, where I sat down on the ground utterly weak and sick in flesh and in spirit.

Much as I needed food that morning I touched it not. I had conceived a loathing for the fish which no one else would touch, and I sickened at the thought of eating any of it.

All day I lay and suffered from indescribable numbness and chill through body and soul.

At night I slept a blessed sleep of dreamlessness and forgetfulness, but before it was light I woke ravenous.

I went to my heap of fish, but I found that even now my loathing was too strong to let me touch it.

Half-desperate, I bethought me of the little market girl, the only being I knew of on the face of the earth who would not willingly let me starve.

The town was four miles from Hawkshold.

Gideon's Rock, etc.



It was still dark when I began to run towards it, often stumbling on my way from very weakness and want.

It was full daylight, and the waggons were unloading before the market when I entered the town.

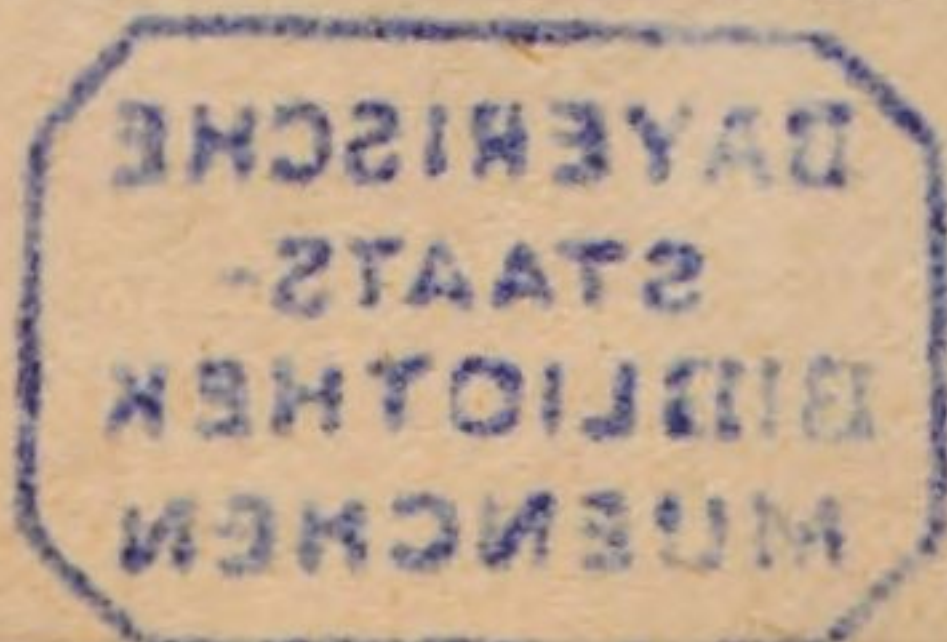
For some time I found my little Samaritan unapproachable — engaged, in fact, in an affray with some half-dozen of her sisterhood, and using her nails, tongue, and empty basket with astonishing effect.

I waited by the pillar against which she usually sat, and watched her with the peevish impatience of a child till the battle was over.

At last I saw her creeping away, vanquished and sulky, to buy her stock of apples and her breakfast, with which she soon came to her place by the pillar where I stood.

At first she did not see me, but sat alternately wiping the blood from her scratched hands and caressing her rosy apples, which appeared by their size and fineness to be affording some comfort to her troubled mind.

After a while she took up the ragged handkerchief containing her breakfast and opened it.



Supporting myself by holding the pillar with one arm, I reached the other down to her, and holding out my hand, said in as gentle a voice as I could that I might not startle her—

“I am starving, my Lady Bountiful! I am starving!”

She looked up at me, and read the suffering in my face till the huge tears rolled from her eyes.

She then rose, and, making me seat myself in her place against the pillar, fed me like a child.

Kneeling before me, regardless of all things but my helpless state, she questioned me, and made me answer her as if she were indeed my mother.

Thus she drew from me how my home was closed against me, and that none would buy my fish.

After musing some time, with her tear-stained, childish face inclined against her hand, she rose and ran off, and presently returned joyfully with an old woman, who made a hard bargain with me to bring her a certain quantity of fish every market-day.

So I departed from this child of mercy, armed with some little strength and comfort, for which I dared to cry out for God's blessing on her many times on my way home.

Among the few books chance had brought to my hands up to that time, were several dealing with the adventures and sensations of men cast alone on desert islands, or places in which they were cut off from their fellow-beings.

I had studied such descriptions with unfailing interest; but in no book of fiction or of facts had I met with conception or experience of such a loneliness as now fell to my lot—there in my own country, my native village, my home for thirty years.

O silence and cold looks! what distances of sea or land can make such desolation as thou canst when thou liest on dear, familiar lips and eyes!

To such desolation I woke morn after morn—on such I closed my eyes night after night.

I made our little boat-house on the beach my home, and none molested me in it. I was miserably safe. The abhorrence in which I was held guarded my little door for me more securely than bars and bolts of iron.

I kept a fire burning there, and made the place as much like a human habitation as I could; and left my door open that those who passed might see I did at least keep the loneliness they doomed me to

clean and pure, and not as the loneliness of a wild beast.

It was the only way I had of trying to prove to them that I did not rage against my lot, but took it patiently, and with such resignation as I could; but that at the same time I clung to my right to be regarded as a human being—a right which by their conduct they seemed to deny me.

There were times when the tempter was at my side whispering, "Pitiful wretch! hast thou no hatred for these Pharisees that go by thee with tossed-up head, thanking God they are not as thou art?" But again and again my heart answered sadly, why should I hate them for cherishing the memory of him who was indeed a wonder among men? and how can I marvel that they loathe his destroyer, when I myself have scarcely heart to feed and keep him in life.

The fish I sold on market-days, according to the arrangement my little Samaritan had made for me, brought me for some time more than sufficed for my small wants; and what did not go for bare necessities, I gave to such poor as I met on my walks to and from the town. But as winter deepened my old fishwife gave up her place in the market, and retired

to the chimney-corner of her cottage to make a few pence by knitting stockings.

Little Rachel still did her best for me, and for some time her zealous kindness and cunning kept me blind to the fact that I was looked on as a shameless intruder in the market, and that in truth I was becoming the misery of her life.

The poor child had, it seemed, given me some hints of this, but my wits had become blunt by want of contact with others, and I had not understood her.

One evening, when I had been into the town to try and change some of my fish for bread at the poor cottages beyond the harbour, I met her going home, weeping as she went, with her shawl to her eyes.

My first word brought out the story with a flood of tears, and imprecations on the hardness of the world in general, and of the market world in particular. She told me the troubles which I had brought upon her. How all her lovers—she was but fifteen, but poverty lives two years in one—how all her lovers had deserted her, and how all the women of the market had nothing but sneers for her, because of her acquaintance with the wretched being who lived on the beach at Hawkshold.

“Now may God forgive me this wrong, my child!”

I cried. "He knows I never dreamed of it. Let us bid each other farewell, Rachel, and thou shalt see me no more."

"Thou art a Job's comforter, thou art!" said Rachel, rubbing the knuckles of a red fist in each eye.

I took them and pressed them to my lips, and burning drops fell on them as I said—

"Farewell! may the Lord repay thee, thou Lady of Charity."

So now the only star of my night was gone—the only fountain in my desert was dried up.

How I suffered in this deeper darkness—this blacker desolation—I dare not let my soul recall. But I was repaid for what I had done, when, one day near Christmas, wandering by the market, cold and hungry, I beheld my Lady Bountiful seated on a basket, under a canopy of holly, toying with her oranges, and scattering saucy, imperious glances on the group of lads and girls around her. No queen among her admiring courtiers was ever happier.

God bless thee, Rachel! my heart was lighter for the sight of thee as I went to my cold and desolate home.

I now felt that nothing in all creation heeded me.

I was, it is true, aware of a Mighty Eye commanding all things, but its meaning was inscrutable. I knew that I was in the range of its immovable gaze, but whether it took more count of me and the suffering of my heart than it did of any stone upon the shore, I could not tell. Faith and despair alternately took possession of me as I laboured to make my soul's garments of misery clean in its sight.

Sometimes I said, in the only manner of prayer I then had—which was speaking partly to myself and partly to the Ear, whose listening I could not be sure of—sometimes I said, “Since the Lord my God is a jealous God, can He look for ever with anger on a servant who hath no eye to please but his in all the world, who tries faithfully to keep, and wash the stains from, and cherish a life which, but for knowing it is his Lord's, and not his own, he would cast away with joy?”

So I laboured in my darkness, and with my small means, daring to ask for no hope, but striving to strengthen patience in me as my only salvation.

The tempter had tried to make me lose this patience through hatred of my fellow-men. He next tried to make me lose it through the love that was

growing up for them in my heart as I watched them from my isolation.

When he saw me looking at the children at play, in the faint hope of bleaching the stains from my soul in the sunshine and dew of their beauty and innocence—when he saw me looking at them thus, he tried to make most bitter for me the thought that I should never know a closer fellowship with these little ones.

When I went, day after day, to watch some window which was curtained close to keep the light from sick eyes—when, day after day, I would go away troubled in my soul at suffering and darkness so long prevailing in that room, my tempter said to me, “Thou fool! who would sorrow for thee at thy sickness or thy death?”

When I saw some home prepared for the reception of a long absent one, and lingered about to see and rejoice in the meeting and greeting and gladness, my peaceful joy would be poisoned by the whisper, “And when wilt *thou* go home?”

The more I watched in my loneliness, the more I considered the temptations, the weakness, the sufferings and endurance of the humanity from which I

was cut off, the more I loved it and longed to return to it.

Some two months had I lived of this life. It might have been two ages!

In that time my father had never ventured again outside his door; my mother, I heard, was sick in her bed, and guarded by an old woman, who flew to the door and locked it whenever she saw me coming from afar.

Her trouble was unnecessary. My last glimpse of home had filled me with too much anguish for me to venture there again—unsummoned.

That winter was to me as an endless succession of hard, white days, with dull skies wearing at sunset a brand reminding me of that which was ever burning deeper into my own soul.

But I have heard since that it was, in truth, a very brief winter—severe, but healthful and bright, and followed by an early and warm spring.

In that winter I saw Alice twice.

The first time she was coming from the church door one Sunday morning. I had been standing without, listening to the singing, and was retreating that the sight of me might not disturb the peace I trusted every soul had obtained there, when suddenly I be-

held her—her face pale as death under the heavy folds of her hood, her figure clad in black from head to foot.

I stood as one transfixed. I saw not only Alice and her grief, but all the nobleness and sweetness of my brother's memory, which inspired them both with unearthly loveliness.

Trembling as I stood with my hand on the churchyard wall, I cried within myself, while my eyes were fixed upon her white, unconscious face—"O Andrew, Andrew! was ever epitaph of man more eloquently written, or on fairer marble!"

The next time that I saw her was at twilight one evening by the grave upon the hill.

Both times I had felt, and had trembled to feel, how in her presence my old love filled my soul to the exclusion of all other thoughts, in defiance of all other memories.

But these moments had been so small, and the days of my loneliness so large, that I remembered them but as two lightning flashes across the darkness of my desolation.

The time was now come when I was to meet her often.

The snow melted—the spring appeared; and even

as the earth put off her whiteness, and smiled up to her Maker in faint, fresh bloom, so did the face of Alice.

Fragile and lovely as the first flowers of the year, she came forth, and went her ways in the village on her errands of charity and comfort, and I met her daily; and these meetings became to me as the salt of my life.

Sometimes she saw me not; at others she saw me, and withdrew her eyes shudderingly. But at last she grew used to meeting me, and seemed but to become a little graver and more pale at my approach.

One morning, as I leaned—a mass of rags and misery—upon her garden wall, I saw Alice come forth from the cottage, with her apron full of grain, and begin to feed her chickens.

She did not immediately see me, and partly in fear of alarming her by any movement, and partly spell-bound by the sweet picture of home-life she made, I remained still, gazing at her, till my soul ached with yearning for one of the tender looks she lavished on her birds with her showers of grain.

At last a hard breath labouring with bitterness escaped me, and she turned her head quickly and saw me.

Her eyes no sooner fell upon me than she glanced up at the hill, as if she half expected to see Andrew rising from his grave, and gazing down in horror at her for having suffered me to approach so near.

With a pain I cannot express, I lifted my arms from her wall and turned to go away; but I heard her light foot approaching the wall as I departed from it, and then I had her voice in my ears, in my heart—her voice all gentle, sweet, merciful:—

“Are you in want, Gideon Weir?” she said.

Scarce knowing what I did, I turned and answered—

“Ay.”

“Of food?” she asked, in pained surprise.

“Nay, mistress. Of strength to support the joy of hearing thy voice once more.”

And, of a truth, I had to lean upon the wall quite giddy and overcome.

Again she gave that half-terrified look towards the hill, and drew back from me, dropping her apron, so that the grain fell, and the chickens came flapping their little wings wildly over it.

After we had both watched them for a moment, she said coldly—

"Do you tell me truly, Gideon Weir, that you never want for bread?"

"I tell you truly, Alice Flemming, that I have always more than enough, for I have just sufficient to keep me in life."

And then again I lifted myself up, and turned and left her, and I felt her looking after me until I reached the beach.

From that morning my tempter triumphed. He saw that my sorrow was no longer the sorrow of patient penance, but of love strong and restless as it was despairing.

One evening, to keep myself from going for the fifth time past Flemming's garden, in which Alice was sitting at her work, I went to my dark little home, and closed my door on the summer's sunset.

I had not many moments sate, trying vainly not to dream of the sweet face in the vine-arbour, when there came a pompous rap at my door.

I was much startled; for none had ever knocked at the door of this place since it had been my home.

I rose and opened it, and my surprise was not lessened when I beheld standing there Eben Flemming.

I had seen him before but once since he came out from his house when Andrew was taken. I was not surprised at this; for besides having many infirmities which kept him much within doors, I had little doubt but that he judged it wise not to show himself much abroad after this sad business, at the root of which he knew himself to have been.

It was soon after my return to Hawkshold that I had met him, when I was wandering on the sands at low tide. I believe he first began by expressing a friendly pity for me, for which I only forbore knocking him down because he had but one leg to stand upon. He next put several questions to me as to smugglers' marks and signs in the sands; and then he made known to me that he knew not to that day where his cargo had been stored by Andrew, who had had but just time to tell him he had placed it where no man on earth but himself or Junk could find it when the men entered and took him.

I asked him why he did not find Junk, and get the secret from him; and he then told me what I had never known before—that a shepherd lad on the hills, near the gaol, had seen the poor fellow seized by a press-gang on the very night of Andrew's imprisonment. The lad had told how he had seen poor Junk

struggling with his captors till scarce one of his rags was left on him, and how he had pleaded with them, pointing towards the gaol, and crying out that there was a life there which only he could save. But the cries and entreaties of the poor giant were unavailing. He was stunned, and borne off—to what miseries, who could tell? but whatever they might be, I knew that suspense as to his master's fate would remain the bitterest of them all.

I had often wondered, since that meeting with Flemming on the sands, if he had heard any news of his cargo. When I saw him standing at my door that evening, I immediately began to think he had not; and I found soon that I was right in so judging.

“Good evening to you, Gideon,” he began, peering inquisitively into my home. “Do I disturb you at your studies?”

“Nay, Master Flemming,” I answered, trying to see through the cunning of his face, “you do but vary them a little unpleasantly; for I find it but a hard and unwelcome task to learn what can have brought *you* here.”

“Come, Gideon, don't be as hard upon me as the world has been on you; for it *has* been hard upon

you, lad, and Eben Flemming cares not who hears him say it."

Yet he took good care that none should hear him say it but myself, for he lowered his voice to almost a whisper, and at the same time pushed past me into the shed.

Poking the door to with his stick, he seated himself on a boat turned on its side against the wall, and began at me thus:—

"Nay, Gideon; but, in good truth, I have come at my daughter's wish to see if I cannot be of some assistance to you. I am concerned—Alice is concerned—at your continuing this wretched, miserable life."

"Would it please you both that I should put an end to it?"

"Exactly what I was going to suggest."

"Really! Your goodness overpowers me!"

"Gideon, don't laugh like that; don't—pray don't! If you only knew how it goes through my poor head! Well, I tell you, I have come to ask you—if I put a good thing in your way, can you, and will you, make a manly effort to break through this—this morbid inactivity, and begin a new life?"

"Did you not put something in my way once before, Master Flemming?" I asked.

"Ay, ay; we all know about that. What's the use of bringing that up? And yet it must be brought up too, for it's about that very affair I have come to speak to you."

"And about which I care not how little is said."

"Yes, yes; of course, sore point—of course. But, hark ye, Gideon, I'm going to give you an aim in life. I really wish to help you. Alice wishes me to help you. Now, I see but one rational way of doing so. Look you, Gideon. Your unfortunate brother cannot possibly have had any chance of taking the cargo to any distance, you must see that. Well, consequently, I am convinced it is in some secret place very close to Hawkshold. Now, it is not possible that a clever fellow like you, knowing, as you do, every crack and cranny of the shore from Blackbeach to Surgess Creek—it's not, I say, possible that you could fail to discover such a place if you set your mind upon it. You will say, naturally, 'What is it to me? Why *should* I set my mind upon it?' I answer that by telling you that the *Black Betsy* is now at Folkestone under repairs, as she will be for some weeks—and if by the time she is ready for sailing you should have found the cargo, and delivered it up to me in as much safety as can be fairly expected,

why, then, I say, I will have a cocket made out for the *Black Betsy*, with your name in it as master, and you will, as I said, begin a new life."

"Master Flemming," I said, opening the door, "if by any chance I found your cargo, it is possible I should tell you of its whereabouts; but as to *looking* for it, I must honestly tell you I have too little love for you or your *Black Betsy* to trouble myself one jot about either. Will you go, or will you stay here and amuse yourself? As for me, I must be seeking some crabs for my supper. I wish you a good night."

However lightly I may have treated him, it is not to be supposed but that Flemming, his visit, and its object, stood out largely against the vacancy of my life, and kept my attention simply because there was nothing else but memory and dreams to keep it. But this visit was an event, a reality, an actual sail on my sea of loneliness specked with phantoms.

At last, through thinking about it so much, a curiosity as to what could have become of the cargo took possession of me; and I found myself, in my lonely walks, exploring the sands and rocks with an interest that grew upon me daily.

Thus, for once, Flemming had proved as good as

his word. He had certainly given me, for some little time, an aim in life. It was vague enough; but I was glad of it, as it kept me from meeting Alice quite so often, and taking fresh light from those sweet eyes to haunt my heart only to make visible to me the depths of its despair.

And yet, Gideon, art thou quite true in this? Would thy heart have so easily submitted to those long absences if it had not some subtle, secret instinct that Alice would think the better of thee for dealing thus hardly with thyself, — that when she *did* meet thee, she looked on thee with more pity and sweetness?

I think it may have been so. I think it was so. I know not how else I could then have lived long hours, long days, without seeing her, without haunting the places where I knew that she would pass.

One morning, when the tide was low, I came towards Gideon's Rock, and found it standing higher out of the water than I had ever before seen it.

I stood for some moments looking at it, and many of the stories connected with it passed through my mind. Among these came sadly enough the last words my brother had ever spoken to me; and I fell to musing, as I often did, over that part of our

quarrel in which it had seemed to me that he was relenting, as I told him of the exertions I had made in his behalf that night. I thought now as I could but think whenever I considered his voice and look, that he really was beginning to doubt his right over the giving up of the cargo at that moment when I thought he was. And yet I asked myself again, how could it have been so, when he turned upon me almost the next instant with that saying, which, uttered in any seriousness, was so full of sinister meaning?

"Go to Gideon's Rock," I repeated to myself, while I stood looking at it, as it rose gaunt and black in the morning sunshine. Well, I could go to it safely enough now; and in idle curiosity to see how nearly I could approach it, I went wading on till I found myself at its base, where the water was but just above my waist.

I made my way right round it, cutting my feet with the small jagged rocks, but determined, now I was so near, to examine it, and make sure no mark or inscription, such as I now constantly looked for, was upon it.

I found, however, nothing of this kind; and, after going half-way round again, I turned back, intending

to leave it, when I caught my foot in something, which I immediately reached down my hand to feel.

It was a chain. I felt it along to the rock, then, bringing my hand along it away from the rock, I came upon some object under the water, which caused me to put both my arms down to feel it; and, no sooner had I done so, than I stood up and gazed towards the grave on the hill, spellbound by a thought, a hope full of joy, a fear full of pain.

Was fresh light about to fall on Andrew's already fair memory, and a deeper horror on my crime? Could it have been—could it possibly have been—that I was not, after all, mistaken as to his relenting towards me, and that he said, "Go to Gideon's Rock," not in derision of my demands about the cargo, but in serious answer to them?

The thing I had found attached to the chain was a keg. Was it one of Flemming's kegs of brandy? Was the cargo here?

I felt about for more chains. I searched round and round the rock till the sole of each foot was a mass of wounds.

This one keg was all that I could find.

I had given up my search in despair, and stood on the sands, letting my eye still roam about it, when

I beheld a rush of water pouring from some crevice in the very depths of the cliff's base.

This immediately fixed my attention. What cavity could be there? I did not remember to have seen any such stream there before.

It came gushing through a pile of large stones. Presently, as I watched it, the flow stopped. I rolled away the stones, and found an opening wide enough to admit me—wide enough, indeed, to admit giants such as Andrew and Junk.

I ran to the shingle where my boat lay, and returned with one of the oars, which I set down to sound the depth inside the opening. I soon touched the ground, and, drawing back the oar, found only a few inches of it wet, and the end sandy.

Throwing it down, I then got through the opening.

I had scarcely time to notice the kind of place I was in before I discovered that I was standing in the midst of Flemming's missing cargo.

In the shallow water at my feet were his kegs of brandy, and far back, on a natural ledge or shelf high and dry and safe from the approach of the water, were stored his chests of tea, and his precious East Indian bales.

I guessed at once, what afterwards I learned to be the truth, that Junk, who spent hours in prowling about the sands in search of such places, had himself discovered this cave, and, knowing that Andrew would assuredly tell me of it if he made known his discovery to him, he had kept it a secret, thinking it might, in some unforeseen hour, be used for his favourite master's benefit.

For some time I stood with my face buried in my hands, overcome with the sense that Andrew was watching me with those calm, honest eyes of his, and saying, "When *wilt* thou know me, Gideon?" For some time I sat thinking what a man this was, and how from childhood if ever a word or deed of his seemed for a time unlike himself, the mystery was at last certain to be cleared from it, and leave it good and true, like all the rest of him.

But in a little while, as I stood looking about me and saying to myself, "It *is* so—the cargo *is* here—I *have* the cargo," the fever of that night on which we started together to save it came back to me. Wild thoughts of what might have been if I had then saved it—thoughts of what Flemming might even now consent to in order to get these things into his possession—thoughts of the long blank life that lay before me,

unless I could give some sudden change to its dreary course—thoughts of the gentleness Alice had lately shown towards me—thoughts of the hopeless soul her love might save, if that love could be won by any means;—these thoughts, and such as these, seethed in my brain in such wild confusion that I feared for my reason, and rushed out into the air in hopes it would restore to me some quietness.

Instead of growing less, my excitement increased so much that I could not stay myself from going at once to Flemming's cottage, though I had as yet formed no idea as to how or when I should make known to him my discovery of his cargo.

At first it was too early for any one in the house to be stirring, and I think I wandered up and down, and leaned upon the garden wall a full hour before I heard the door-bolt slipped.

Then the door opened, and Alice stood there.

The first thing that she did was to put up her hands and shade her eyes from the bright sunshine, and to gaze up long and tenderly at the grave upon the hill. I had seen this before. I knew it was the first thing she greeted in the morning, the last she bid farewell to at night. I had seen it often, had known

I should see it this morning, yet I suffered as if some painful surprise had come upon me. I suffered as keen a jealousy as if the giant had stood there above the sod in his strength, instead of lying beneath it, dust to dust.

Alice now came into her garden, and began to gather her apron full of roses, choosing only those which that morning's sun had opened, for such alone seemed to her fresh and sweet enough to be laid on Andrew's grave. She came forth; she passed up the village, and began to ascend the cliff.

I followed her, and unnoticed watched her as she knelt in the wet grass and laid her roses at the head and feet and heart of that large, still form, that made so noble a mound upon the hill.

When she had laid all her flowers upon it she gathered some daisies from the grave, kissing them and gazing on them with moist eyes, as if the cold hands of the dead had given them to her as the best return they could offer for her own sweet gift.

She rose, and as she turned found herself face to face with me.

She grew pale, and glanced down the pathway of the hill, as half-inclined to pass me and hasten home.

I grasped her wrists suddenly, and held her, still

looking into her face in a silence that must have been almost more alarming to her than any words. I saw the quiet, deathly terror stealing over her. I felt her weak arms quivering in my grasp.

She conquered her fear wonderfully, and glancing at the grave, looked from it to me, saying with a smile—oh, so meek and white!—

“Gideon, it is long since we three were together. Let there be peace between us.”

“Peace!” I answered. “Yes, there must be peace, there shall be. I can no longer live without it. Peace! Yes. My life is a war—a war against the death you all shut me in with. What is this dust buried here that you come to it with your roses and your tears? Can it feel—can it suffer—can it struggle in its grave as I do in this living grave of mine? Oh, you woman, you charitable, tender soul, that can never hear the cry of the hungry mouth without running to feed it!—how can you, how dare you, tread on a living heart to lay your roses and your kisses on a dead one? I have suffered it too long. I will not, I cannot, any more!”

“Oh, Gideon! Gideon!” she cried, “do not terrify me. Ah, yes, I know you have suffered; but be rea-

sonable. Let us talk together. Oh, you hurt me! You do not wish to hurt me, Gideon?"

Seeing she was like to drop to the ground, I drew her to a stone near the edge of the cliff, where I made her sit while I threw myself before her, still holding her wrists as in a vice.

"As for him," I cried, "has he not his Saviour and all the angels in heaven to love him, while I crawl upon the earth despised, shunned, hated, yet with a soul that my God looks to me to save?"

"And you shall save it, Gideon!" she said, looking down into my wild eyes with tears, but sweet heroic strength in her own. "I see that the Lord is punishing you too heavily to be meaning to cast you off. He is demanding of you your fullest penance, that when it is paid you may dwell with Andrew, and be the same to him you were when I was a little child, and listened to you both singing together in your boat. And I, too, shall leave this earth with joy, and you shall both be dear to me, as you were then, though you did not know it."

"What is that to me—whether you loved me as a child, or whether you will love me when I am dead? I have piety enough to believe that in my Lord's presence I should have no need of you, or your love. It

is now—now that I perish, that no hand but yours will or can save me? It is *now*—*now* that I demand of you help—love—salvation! It is now that I will have it, or—you die!”

“O Gideon! what would you do? You would not cast me down! Mercy—mercy, as you hope for it!”

“I tell you,” I said, as I held her in my arms over the edge of the cliff, “it is now I will be saved, or lost for ever!”

“Gideon, my voice is gone—I cannot cry for help! But you—*you* hear me! God forgive you if you do not heed! Help—help, against this fiend that is not you! Spare me! save me!”

“Wilt save *me*? Wilt swear to take thy useless love from the dead, and give it to the living?”

She turned, even in her agony of fear, and, with a burst of triumphant laughter, answered—

“Never! never!”

“Then take this kiss, and go to him by the death he died!”

“Ah! ah! Gideon, one minute!”

“As many as thou wilt. Come, thou art very young; life is sweet.”

“Ay, ay! Let me—let me live!”

“Wilt swear to love me, and be mine?”

The faint eyes looked at me, and life seemed to die in them as the white lips said—

“I will—I will! Let me live!”

“Thou wilt be my wife?”

“Ay! Let me live!”

“Dost thou swear it?”

“Yes—yes! Let me live!”

I bore her from the edge of the cliff, and laid her quivering, shuddering form gently down upon the grass.

No sooner had I done so, than, turning her eyes on the grave, she threw up her arms, crying out—

“O Andrew! coward that I was! I might have been with thee by this!”

She then fell into a death-like faint, and, taking her in my arms like a child, I carried her down the hill and through the village to her home.

I told Flemming as I laid his daughter's senseless form before him that she had promised to become my wife, and gave him some hint as to my knowledge of the cargo, which I swore he should never see if he used any means to cause Alice to break her promise. I told him I would not see her again until the next

morning; when, if I found her true to her word, he should know as much about his goods as I did.

I said all this in a perfectly calm and dogged manner, which puzzled and awed him.

All that day a strange excitement possessed me; it was so intense, so quiet, I asked myself once or twice, "Is it excitement or great calm that has come over me?" I felt that I had at last broken from the chains of remorse and humiliation which had held me down in the dust so long. I walked with a sense of wild delicious freedom; I looked defiantly in men's faces as I passed them, saying to myself, "The time is past when I bent my head before you. Look as you will, I can give you scorn for scorn." I felt it was a better thing to be a man hated and feared by all men, than such a worm as I had been for all to trample on and loathe.

But as night came—night, the time of my bitterest sufferings and most passionate prayers—as night came, and I lifted the latch of the door of my home, the solitary being who had lived and suffered there so long, my old spirit—worn and wasted with seeking patiently though hopelessly to allay the anger and abhorrence of God and men—my old spirit of remorse and penitence cried out to my new spirit of exultation

and defiance, "Where now is the atonement I have laboured and endured for, so long and in such agony?" And out of my own lips came the bitter answer, "Undone! undone!"

I sank on the floor in the darkness, and the coldness of fear seized me from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot.

That Eye, that seemed so cold, so inscrutable, had It seen my sorrow and labour and patience favourably? What if It had — what if It had seen the end of my atonement near, and looked on me this night to find all—all undone!

Where I had fallen as I entered I sate the livelong night. I could not cross my room, nor seek my bed; too unworthy I felt to tread in my own footsteps—even those which all men had shunned; too unworthy to lay my head upon my pillow, even that on which I had scarce known one hour's sleep quite free from sorrow.

In the morning at the hour I was expected I appeared at Flemming's cottage.

Entering, I could but remember how another had once come on a like mission—to give up Flemming's cargo, and claim the hand of Alice.

I found them prepared for my visit. Flemming disturbed, frightened, yet full of curiosity about his cargo.

Alice sat almost as rigid and pale as when I left her yesterday in her swoon.

Neither gave me any manner of greeting.

"Alice," I said, "are you prepared to keep your word to me?"

She answered in a voice too low for Flemming—who was somewhat deaf—to hear:

"I bought my life of you—I must pay the price—*when* I must."

"Master Flemming," I said, turning to him, "your cargo is safe in a cave under Gideon's Rock; I discovered it but yesterday. Now suffer me, I pray, to speak alone with Alice for one moment."

Looking uneasily from me to Alice, he left us; but I saw that he waited near in the garden, looking perplexed and savage.

"So, Alice," I said gently, "you do consider that you now are mine?"

She did not answer, but locked her hands together, and let her head droop to her bosom in silent misery.

"Your sorrow tells me that you do," I said. "Your face has already put on the whiteness meet for such

a bridal; and I am very glad, Alice, to know that you are mine: because being mine, even though by such fearful means, it is something to give you up, to give you back to Andrew, to give you back your truth to him, to give back into your own and God's keeping, your sweet life that you would have bought so dear."

She fell from her chair on to her knees, and gazed up at me with parted lips and hands against her temples, as to assist her eyes in reading my face.

"Nay, Alice, my words are true; let thy peace come back to thee. Yesterday, in the madness of despair, I dropped my heavy cross and seized on a fair crown; but to-day I am sane, and give back what I seized in my madness, and take up my cross once more, promising you, however I suffer under it, to trouble you never again—to approach you never, never more, unless you should call upon me as your servant to serve you."

Seeing that she tried to drag herself towards me on her knees, I went to her and bending over her touched her hair with my lips.

It seemed to trouble her greatly that she could not speak to me by reason of the faintness that was seizing her in the excess of her relief and joy.

I went out and sent her father to her.

"Go," I said; "Alice is sick, but fear not for her—she is very happy. If Andrew can approach as near to life as she has approached to death, it seems to me they are meeting now, and she is telling him how we have plighted our troth."

In retaking upon myself my old cross, forgetting that I could hardly bear its weight before, I was presumptuous enough to ask of God that He would double the burthen of it rather than put me back on the path of atonement which I had travelled in such sore weariness.

Terribly was I punished for my want of humility, for my sufferings now so increased upon me as to cause me to long for death to change them, for I had no faith, no hope that even *that* could end them.

Alice was stricken down by a severe and long sickness, and the whispered story of my violence to her had given new strength to the horror and detestation in which I was held.

It was said that whatever I had done or might do, Flemming dared not take any steps towards my punishment, as he stood in great fear of me by reason of the secrets I knew of his doings with smugglers.

More than once while watching her window has a

stone from an unseen hand struck me, and drawn my blood, or fallen near me, and hurt my spirit only. And one night when I went home to it, I found my little shed in flames.

So now I was an outcast indeed.

I still had my little boat in which I went fishing, and lived by carrying my fish to distant places where I was not known, and selling it at half its value, or changing it for a morsel of bread.

I could not bring myself to leave the village and live somewhere else, though there was no man in it who would suffer the sole of my foot on his threshold. I could not leave it with so vile a memory of me. I felt I must and would wait and endure till God in his own time should soften the hardness of my fellow-men, and the hardness of my father and mother towards me.

There came a day when I perceived there was some fresh grievance against me in the village.

All whom I passed turned to look after me as they would ask, "Dares he to walk abroad on such a day?"

Women whispered together at their doors, and I heard one say after I had passed—

"There he goes, the bloodthirsty wolf! Who will save the old man from him now!"

Immediately I thought, my mother is dead, and ran to my old home to find my fear was indeed true.

A crowd was round the house, and would not let me pass without my using some force, which I could not forbear doing.

But at the threshold of the door I was met by the old clergyman of the parish, who stayed me sternly, and touching my breast with the end of his Bible, said solemnly—

"Let the Word of God keep you from entering this house."

Then, in answer to the silent entreaty of my hands and eyes, he said—

"Gideon Weir, the grey hairs of your mother have been brought by you with sorrow to the grave; and your father, now alone in his affliction, has appealed to me to save him from your presence, which he declares would cause his death. As a minister of God I entreat you to receive and take to your heart these commands, sent by this aged mourner from the side of your dead mother."

I fell upon my knees, and after endeavouring vainly for some time to speak, I gasped—

"Yes, yes, tell him I do—I do receive them. I will obey him!"

Three days later, when I went to the grave upon the hill, I found another one open beside it. My mother's last wish, it seemed, had been to be laid beside her son.

I saw the funeral, not daring to join it or follow. I stood and watched it from afar off.

After the death of my mother a thing happened which was regarded in the village as little less than a miracle; and such, indeed, it seemed to me as in my misery I observed it.

My father's mind, which, as he found himself growing old and weary of great exertions, he had allowed somewhat too easily to wander and grow useless, and had also helped to deaden by strong drinks—my father's mind, as if sternly and suddenly called back by sorrow, returned to him most marvellously. His body also, under its government, began to lose many of its infirmities, and to regain something of its former strength.

It was whispered that hopes of avenging the death of his wife and son were inspiring the old man with

new life; but to me the vengeance he was taking by his unchanging hardness, his looks of calm implacable anger when he by chance encountered me,—to myself this vengeance seemed all that he could desire, and I was too much crushed by it to have fear of any greater.

The life of Alice was still despaired of.

I have since heard that after the death of my mother she had sent a message of comfort to me, but that Flemming, fearing some repetition of my violence, had kept it back. It is but lately I have been able to say, "May God forgive him for it." Such an act was worse than dashing a cup of water from the lips of the dying—than leaving a blind man with an open pit before him.

Oh, the misery it might have saved me to know that one soul *could* turn to me in pity! I find it hard to give the faintest conception of what I mean when I say I was abandoned utterly, shunned as a pestilence by good and bad.

There was an old seat in the village surrounding a fine chestnut tree, and here, when the evenings were warm, the aged and infirm who could not hope ever again to enjoy the lanes or beach, came and sat and gossiped.

But if it chanced that *I* ventured to rest myself a moment on that seat, I immediately found myself alone, and saw the bent backs, grey heads, and crutches of my old neighbours departing with what speed they might.

One Sunday I ventured to enter the church, and, finding no seat vacant, for the building was small and our parish large—finding no seat vacant save on the low form close before the pulpit, I sate me down there.

While I remained a few moments with my face in my hands, I heard a noise as of feet moving, the rustling of garments, and opening of pew doors; and when, on taking my hands from before my face, I glanced around me, I beheld that all the people had crowded together at the far end of the church, and that there was a space of empty pews betwixt them and me.

At finding myself thus in the house of God marked out for His eye by the circle of loneliness which even here had spread itself around me, I fell upon my knees before Him and remained so all the time. But the misery that filled me was as wax in my ears, and deafened me to the words of the preacher.

In the afternoon of that Sunday I was lying on

the hill by the two graves, when I suddenly became aware that a large number of people had gathered together some little way below where I was.

I soon perceived that it was to hear a young preacher, of whom in my wanderings about the village I had heard much. I had met him several times, for he was fond of seeking the solitude I so longed to escape from. I had at first looked upon him with some curiosity, but when I saw he was little more than twenty years of age, and had a face of seraphic sweetness and beauty, I passed him with contempt at the idea of a boy like that having in him any power of ministering to the souls of rough Hawkshold smugglers. I set him down in my own mind as a mere woman's pet—a child not yet old enough to understand the wickedness of tampering with God's Word. The slight shudder and flushing of the cheek which I noticed as he passed me, showed me my story had been made known to him; and I said to myself as I looked after him, "Vain fool! little *he* knows whether I am most sinning or sinned against. There is mire upon me, and, no matter how it came, he fears to let his garments touch it." Yet this man had been preaching through the country, and tarrying longest in towns and villages of worst repute.

He came to the hill where the people were gathered that Sunday afternoon, and I soon heard his voice rising and falling with a music that I thought was most likely more heavenly without the words that accompanied it—and which I could not hear—than with. At last, however, I was possessed by a curiosity to know how he, the innocent and beloved and flattered, could even *pretend* to meddle between sinful, half-savage men and their Maker.

So I drew near, and, lying with my elbows on the grass and my hands supporting my head, I looked at him, and listened to what he was saying.

I listened long. It must have been for full half an hour that I listened; yet I heard nothing that was in any way new to me. He told the story of Christ in language that was almost such as a child might have used.

How, then, did he make these rough men drop their pipes and stare upon his face? How brought he myself, crawling on my hands and knees, nearer and nearer to him?

Because though he did indeed speak almost as a child might have spoken, it was as a child fresh, panting, from the crowd at Calvary; with spent breath and hair blown back by the speed with which he had

run to tell the story to his fellows; his innocent eyes aghast and tearful, his pure mouth pale and quivering, his hands upon his bursting heart.

You expected to see the multitude rise up and demand of him where this scene of horror was going on, that they might run and lay their hands on the assassins, and set the martyr free. Then suddenly while he had us in this spirit he cried out to us with a reproach, the strength of which lay in its almost divine sadness; and accused us of faithlessness to this martyr's memory, with cold forgetfulness of Him. He spoke not of our sins, but his words went deeper than if he had, for they cut into the root of sin; they smote that callousness, that death in life from which sin springs.

Now when I first drew near to listen, the crowd saw me and moved from me farther along the hill; and the preacher, absorbed by his subject and scarcely noticing the thing at all, moved after them.

But when, all-engrossed by him, I forgot myself and again approached close to the others to hear him and see him the better, and when they again drew farther away, he paused and looked, and became aware of why this was, and remained standing still by my lonely figure.

"Draw near, my brethren," he said, turning towards the crowd. "You have a right to listen, if you wish it, as well as this man, though his right is greater than yours."

At this I rose and placed myself at a little distance, and the people came to where they had been before; but I saw that the boy still turned his eyes much towards me, as though I had been one whom he loved instead of one who caused him to shudder whenever he met me.

When all had gone, and I was alone on the hill, I thought about him much.

In the evening, wandering by where he lodged, I saw many men and women and children coming out from his lodging, some in tears; and I understood that he was going to depart from the village early on the following morning, and that very soon he was to leave England to be a missionary in Africa.

I stood watching the people going in and coming out till they all went to their homes, and left him alone. Even then I remained wandering up and down before the house, strangely reluctant to go away and sleep, and find in the morning that the boy had departed, and I should see him no more.

With a sudden impulse that must have come from

instinct rather than have been brought by any reasoning in my own mind, I opened the door, went in, and stood before him.

No sooner had I done so, than a despair I cannot describe came over me at the sight of his young face, and the helpless, startled look he turned upon me.

"I suppose you know who I am?" I asked bluntly.

"Yes—you are Gideon Weir," he answered, passing his hand across his brow as if to put aside the weariness that was coming upon him. "I have heard of you. Can I be of any service to you?"

"That's what I want to learn," I said. "Can you be of any service to me? It doesn't look much like it; but I may as well tell you all the truth, and perhaps you can put it before your Master as I cannot, and learn what it is He wants of me, or whether He wants anything of me at all. You say you have heard about me. Yes, you have heard one side of the story; now you shall hear the other."

I told him all, pausing now and then to stare at him, as I saw his face for some time remain simply calm and attentive, and showing none of those signs of weakness or horror that I expected every minute to see. I put my whole life before him, unsparing of his youth and innocence. I described the horrors of

my solitude, and the different phases of my year's misery. My sins, my remorse, my temptations—conquered or conquering—I poured all before him, and he sat bending forward from his chair, his face gazing up at me fixedly and reverently, as if I had been a master teaching him instead of a poor wretch come to him to seek help even from his youth and inexperience.

“There,” I said as I finished, “is my story—doubt one word if you dare!”

“I dare not—I do not,” he answered, rising. “And now——”

“And now,” I said, “I ask you if your religion can give me any light and help. You see what I am, cast off by all, shunned like a leper, my father's door closed to me, my roof burnt from over my head. How am I to live?—how am I to keep the soul God claims as His? Show me—show me my place among the children of men!”

He laid one hand on my shoulder, and striking his breast with the other, said, with the smile of an angel—

“Here, my brother—here, if thou wilt, till the bosom of thy Saviour shall receive thee.”

For some moments I gazed upon him in stupor and silence, then my heart leapt to him, and I fell

upon his neck with the cry of a starved and broken spirit.

All that night we sat and conversed together, and when I slept beside him, it was in the knowledge that we were to be comrades and brothers on his long journey, and sharers in his great work, the dangers and privations of which I saw that I could much lessen for him, though I had small hope of becoming, as he said he would make me, a fellow-preacher with him.

So that was the last night of the old life. To-morrow I was to depart from the eyes that loathed me—from my native village and my country.

We set forth in the early morning. I had determined not to trust myself near the home of Alice, but when on looking round as we began to climb the hill I saw her standing at her gate leaning for support upon the arm of her little maid, I was moved to run to her and tell her what I had done and whither I was going.

She heard me with great feeling in her face, and when I knelt down and kissed her hands—taking what we both felt was in all likelihood a last leave of her—she took my head in her hands, and in sight of all the village touched my forehead with her lips.

After this she fell weeping into the arms of her maid, and I ran and joined the minister on the hillside, not daring to look back.

So we went away together, and I felt, as I thought of my rags and my wolfish face, my bare feet and uncovered head, and looked on the grace and decent garb of my companion—I felt it was no wonder that all the people came running out to see this child of heaven depart with the rough brand he had snatched from the burning.

PART III.

TEN years had passed since I went away from Hawkshold with the minister.

The history of those years I shall not tell here, since it has already been written by a pen that has traced better things of me than my own could do, and the only fault I have to find with my friend's record of our mission is, that his memory has sometimes failed him, and he has attributed to me much good work which I can but regard as solely his own.

We had returned to England, and been sent our different ways to continue our work.

Mine led me one morning to the hill overlooking my native village.

It was on the morning of Christmas Eve that I found myself standing there, my Bible in my hand, watching the people coming to me in groups from the village and from the fishers' cottages around it.

Many also came from other places—for the name

of my friend, which I too had borne on our travels, was known far and wide.

Now, although this return was brought about by the natural course of my new life, and not by my own design, it was none the less one of those events which appear as full of fearful importance to us as birth or death. Glad and thankful I was to arm my soul, all weak and trembling with suspense, as to what changes it was doomed to meet,—glad and thankful I was to arm my soul with the Word of God, to come here as His messenger, and as His messenger depart, if I found too great a coldness or changes too bitter to look on in this home of my youth, this most beloved and pleasant spot, kept so green in my memory under the cloud-like shadow of sad thoughts, regrets, and longings, for ever hovering over it.

Ten years! I felt as one risen from the dead as I stood there, gazing across my open Bible at the forms and faces, and endeavouring, yet fearing, to see through the veil of time that enfolded them, and as yet kept them strange to my eyes.

I watched them coming; my heart trembling with innumerable fears and hopes as each face drew nigh, though my lips tried to smile and say calmly to God—

"I am ready—I can behold whatever truths Thou hast for me. What is *this* home to me when I have Thine to look to? If there be none here with whom my heart would abide, or who would abide with me, let me learn the truth and depart as I came—Thy pilgrim-servant."

Now as they drew near to me I began to know face after face with a quickness that surprised myself, and wrought me to such a state of excitement, though I had as yet recognised none especially dear to me, that I foresaw it would be well to keep my eyes upon my book if I would retain sufficient calmness even to begin my work.

I saw no young mother with her children about her but what I asked myself, "Have I kept a false image of Alice in my heart, and can *this* be her?"

I saw no aged head bringing the silver of its hairs as the only offering it had to lay before its God, but I thought, with suspended breath, "The grave is long in claiming its due sometimes, and death is often slow in gathering its withered fruit; what if this should be my father?"

I perceived then that such thoughts as these would utterly unfit me for my work, so I fixed my eye upon my Bible, and seeing before me the words, "Blessed

are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," I took them for my text, and lifting up my voice, let my soul speak from its fulness of longing for that mercy I had sought so vainly at the hands of those around me.

I related to them my own story, not in substance, but in spirit. I told it to them as a parable, setting forth the cruelty of stubbornly withholding mercy from a sinner perishing for want of it. I laid before them the sufferings of such a man with such fearful truth, as well I might, that ere many minutes had passed there was the sound of weeping all around me.

My own emotion at hearing the sufferings of those days of desolation wept over by the eyes which had regarded them so coldly was now becoming greater than I could conceal. Moreover, my confusion was increased by two objects close beside me, and which my dimmed averted eyes would, in spite of me, invest with a likeness of Alice and my father.

I knew one was a woman pale and lovely as a spirit, and a man's form bent double with age leaned on her. I knew this without looking, for I dared not look. They were embracing each other, and weeping more bitterly than any of the rest.

Mastering my voice as best I could, I began again

to speak, when I was interrupted by a feeble piteous cry near me:

"Let me go to the minister. I know it is my son he speaks of—it is my Gideon he means—I know it. Let me go to the minister and ask him if he lives."

It *was* my father clinging to Alice, and endeavouring to move her towards me.

At the moment that I looked at them fully, she was glancing up as if to implore my forgiveness for the old man's interruption, and no sooner did our eyes meet than hers became fixed, startled, searching.

In another instant she called me by name with a gladness that thrilled my soul; and as I went towards her and my father, I heard the cry run through the crowd—

"It is Wolf Weir! It is Gideon Weir!"

As I approached her she put my father in my arms with a smile I shall never forget; and I drew him to my breast, kissing the dear hands that gave him.

The old man did not yet know me, he was only amazed, agitated, and bewildered. Pushing me a little from him, as I still held him, he gazed up into my eyes with a look of feeble wonder and a strange-

ness that cut me to the heart. But at last I saw a recollection of my face coming to him.

Clutching feebly at the breast of my coat with his skeleton hand, he asked in a voice half-querulous, half-passionate—

“What’s all this about? Who *are* you?”

Looking down with awe into his eyes as I held him, I replied—

“Father, it is I—it is your son—Gideon! This is not my place; let Alice support you—that—that I—may kneel down before you.”

But he would not suffer me to move. Clutching still at my coat, he gazed upon my face till conviction seized him, and he laid down his white head on my bosom, sobbing like a babe.

After a while he lifted his head and looked at me, and then from me to the people standing round us.

“Look, neighbours,” he said, “this is my son come back to me. Now you see why the Lord has spared me so long. Eh, lad, I’ve been waiting at death’s door for ye a long time; I wonder ye didn’t find me shut in and locked up. I do. I don’t know how they come to let me bide so long outside; I think as your mother wouldn’t let ’em let me in till I’d given you the blessin’ she left for you with her dying breath.”

"Did she leave me her blessing, father?"

"Ay, Gideon, and I kept it back. I was a wicked man—the Lord forgive me!—I was a hard man. Ay, but I'm glad I've lasted out till now, to give you your mother's blessing, Gideon, and mine along with it. I'll go to her now whenever the Lord pleases, Gideon. And I'll tell her how you've come back a good man, a very good man, a minister. Bless the woman, how glad she'll be! for she did take on dreadful about ye, Gideon, in her last days, when I was all so hard on her, and wouldn't let her see you. She often said to me—your mother did—how contrary the Lord had been to her with you boys, making one so good and one so bad, as they'd sure to be divided in the other life, and keep her poor spirit wandering from one place to the other all the days of eternity—for she said she knew she couldn't rest in either if you lads wasn't both there with her. And now, the Lord be praised, we'll all be together, won't we? I know I'm the wickedest sinner o' the lot, but my son's a minister, and I know he'll send me to heaven respectable—won't you, Gideon? O Lord, now—now Thy servant will depart in peace!"

Alice and I led the old man home between us.

I stopped before the door of the old cottage, but

Alice, with a smile, shook her head and pointed towards her own home, saying—

“Nay, Gideon, for the present, till you take him from me, your father’s home is there, and has been there ever since my father died, eight years ago.”

I could make no answer, I could utter no thanks, and in silence went on till we reached the familiar little gate, through which I could still fancy I saw Eben Flemming’s wooden leg coming and going.

The place was gay with green boughs and holly, to which my father pointed as we entered.

“There, see, Gideon,” he said; “she put it up to cheer my poor old eyes. She little thought it was to welcome thee home.”

The next few hours were fraught with a happiness more deep and exquisite than I can describe. I can only say it was happiness that equalled in intensity any of my bygone sorrows.

I watched Alice, full of care for my father’s comfort, moving hither and thither with the humility of a child, and the dignity of the matron and mistress of the house. I watched her busy with her maid in bestowing her Christmas gifts of food to the poor and hungry souls who had come by her orders to share

with her the plenteous good fare with which her kitchen was stocked; and, as I watched her, so sweet a sense of home and peace possessed me that I cared not to look beyond the present hour.

Was she much changed to other eyes? I wondered. To mine she was infinitely fairer than before I left. She had lost the shrinking timidity I remembered in her then, and had gained a generous frankness of look and step—a bright, matronly charm of manner that puzzled and enchanted me. I wondered how it was so solitary a life as hers had not saddened her, and wasted that bright, sweet health that gave me such joy to see.

I perceived that in devoting herself all these years to the care and comfort of the lonely old man, her life had not been unhappy; her labour had been a labour of love. For whose sake was this? For Andrew's still?

When her morning tasks were finished, she came and placed herself on a low seat between me and my father, whose long walk to the hill had wearied him, and caused him to fall asleep in his chair.

She questioned me concerning my travels and my work, and showed so much feeling on hearing of some of the hardships which I had undergone, that I had

to cheer her, and remind her how this day repaid me for all.

"But now," she said, with her eyes full of tears, "you will go away on your mission knowing that you have a home to rest in when you need rest, and a father and sister to receive and welcome you."

It was now, for the first time since I had left Hawkshold, that my work appeared to me small and worthless and inexpressibly wearying. Since that cry of Alice when she recognised me on the hill, a strong and silent hope, of whose existence I scarcely knew till now, had made the old life of self-sacrifice and resignation appear suddenly too gloomy and bitter for endurance.

I could not forbear letting her see my trouble in my face and hear it in my voice as I said—

"Alice, Alice! why did God let my steps bear me here?"

"To gladden the eyes of those who watched and prayed for your return," she answered sweetly and firmly.

"Alice, you should not have called my name as you did when you remembered me on the hill this morning."

"And why, Gideon?"

“Because it made me think, at last Alice loves me.”

“And so I do, more dearly than any creature on the earth—so dearly that I could refuse you nothing—and if you wish me to become your wife I will even do so, Gideon. I have wished much that you would not desire this; but I feel that after the sufferings you have endured through me, the rest of my life is little enough to give you. I would have given it you as a sister much more gladly than I can as a wife.”

“Then let it be so, Alice,” I answered, after a silence. “God forbid that I, who have vowed to Him that I will sacrifice myself for others,—God forbid that I should let you sacrifice yourself for me!”

At that moment my father woke and started at the sight of me; then, as recollection came to him, he laid his hand fondly on the head of Alice, and said—

“Lassie, I forgot my son Gideon had come home.”

“Nay, father,” I answered, “you must not call Alice Flemming’s house home any more. You will live with your son now—will you not?”

“Yes, yes, O yes!” said the old man, nodding

energetically. "I shall live with my son Gideon now."

Alice stood looking at him with eyes full of tears.

"What, Dad!" she said, with tender reproach. "You would leave me?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure," said the old man, now rising in a flutter of excitement. "Are you a-going yet, Gideon? She'll soon put up my clothes. I'll soon be ready. Where's my other coat? Make haste, lassie, I'm going home with my son Gideon."

"Then go along, the ungrateful pair of you!" cried Alice, turning away, and bursting into tears.

The next instant I was beside her, and her arms were round my neck, as she cried—

"I cannot part with him, Gideon; I cannot be left alone in the world. Let it be as you wish. You two are all I have."

There was, I do believe, no happier fireside in all England than Alice Flemming's that day. From the moment that she gave herself to me, it seemed to me that a great relief and peace had come to her; and I felt this was solely due to her having put aside the thought that she belonged to the dead, and to the

discovery that she loved much better than she had till now known the man who had so faithfully loved her for nearly twelve years.

I saw her once, when she stood at the open door, look up towards the graves on the hill, and then let her head droop with an air of pain and shame. But this look did not trouble my strong, deep joy, for I took it only as evidence that she knew her heart was no longer true to Andrew, and could not as yet abandon the fear that her faithlessness was wrong and unnatural.

To myself her manner was all that I could desire. She wearied not as I told her much that she had never known, or guessed, about the story of my love; and over and over again she pressed my hand saying—

“Ah well, thou *hast* suffered, my poor Gideon! I am sure there can be none on earth or in heaven who could deny that it is right I should belong to thee now.”

The evening had come, and we were sitting in the firelight. My father having gone to bed weary with the day's excitement, we were sitting gazing silently into the fire, when the little maid brought to us a letter. She gave it to her mistress.

"It is for you, Gideon," said Alice.

As I took it I saw by the firelight that it was from my friend who had promised to send to me, directing his letter to the town where I had been last staying.

I found the letter addressed according to my directions,—how then had it followed me here?

A vague fear that he might himself have brought it and be waiting to prevail upon me to obey some summons to stern duty it contained, troubled me as I opened the letter.

To my amazement, I found it did but bring another joy to this day already so full for me.

I had no sooner read it than I cried to Alice—

"Junk is here. Junk is in the village now. He has been seeking me, has followed me over half the world; he has learnt that I am here from my friend, who has sent him with this letter."

"Who brought it?" asked Alice, turning to her maid.

"Poor old Junk," answered a voice at the door that caused us to start to our feet by the vividness of the recollections it brought. "May he come in, Mistress Alice!"

"With a true welcome," she answered, coming with me to the door.

So a weird sailor giant was soon sitting in my chair, and I did for a time forget even Alice in my delight at seeing him again, or rather in recognising him by feeling his huge limbs, for he was so much changed I should never have known him for the Junk of old days. I was indeed filled with gratitude to God to hear the faithful friend of Andrew say that he had heard all my story from the minister, and that after hearing it he had felt as eager to find me and serve me as if I had been Andrew himself.

He told me he had seen me in the distance, and called to me as he was being taken by the press-gang.

"And now," he said, lowering his voice to a tone of awe and sorrow, "I have a thing to tell you of that night which you never knew, Gideon. I saw him that night."

"No!" cried Alice and myself, starting up at the same instant.

"Ay—I saw him and spoke with him; and I can tell you this much of what I know of his last thoughts of you—he would be glad now after all that has passed—he would be glad now to know what I know—that Mistress Alice loves you and will be your wife."

"Silence, Junk," said Alice, greatly moved. "You go too far in presuming to know the mind of one in heaven."

"But tell me, Junk," I asked, full of wonder, "how could you have seen him that night?"

"You shall hear, Gideon," he said. His voice sunk almost to a whisper, yet thick with feeling, and his eyes turned away full of tenderness and awe. "There were two jailors in that prison who had both of them goods among the cargo seized from our men in the Folkestone affair. Junk—ay, even myself, poor silly Junk—could prove this and ruin them. I went and saw one of them and told him so, and swore I would betray them if I was not allowed to see Andrew for a few minutes that night."

"Faithful Junk!" I said.

"Ay," he answered, drawing a long shuddering breath, "thou mayst well say so;" and I thought at once the poor fellow's devotion must indeed have cost him dear.

"And so you saw him, Junk?"

"And I saw him, and I said, 'Master, I am no good outside to save thee; but if thou wilt,' I said, 'thou shalt save thyself.' You know there was then in Hawkshold a lawyer whose life Andrew saved—a

kinsman of Master Flemming's, who made it his business to do all he could in having the lives of us free-traders spared. Now I felt that if Andrew could go to this man and demand that his best powers should be used for saving his life in return for that he had saved, I felt that he would certainly be spared. He said to me, 'Go you, then, Junk;' but I knew that that day's sharp dealing had turned all connected with us into cowards, and I told him so, and that it was only himself standing face to face with the lawyer and demanding life for life that could move him. He lifted his chained hands and said, 'Why talk of this? what can *I* do?' I said to him then, 'Poor Junk has thought of that, master; you know we are of a size, your own mother scarce knows us apart at dusk. Let me take off your chains and clothes and put you them on me, and slip on poor Junk's rags, and go out instead of him.'

"Thou faithful soul!" sobbed Alice, kneeling before him. "Well, Junk, and then?"

"And then he refused, as thou knowest," continued the giant in a choking voice; "but I went on my knees to him, I besought him for his life's sake, and my own sake, and for Gideon's, and—and—*thine*."

Alice now had her hands upon his arms, and was gazing up at him with her white lips apart; when his voice so trembled over the word "*thine*" she threw back her head, crying—

"O Thou who raised Lazarus from the dead, keep my heart from bursting till I hear this story to the end! Go on—go on! And when thou didst plead for my sake—what then?"

"Why, then," answered the giant, speaking for the first time in his full voice; "then the coward yielded, and is—here!"

"Andrew!" I cried, and he rose; and we looked at each other by the dim firelight, forgetting Alice and all things, even as Cain and Abel, had their spirits met after death, must have forgotten all things but themselves.

"Gideon! Brother!" said Andrew; and we fell upon each other's neck with a joy that was almost an agony.

His arms were the first to loosen an embrace such as only one restored as from the dead can give or receive. And then he turned to where Alice stood, her hands clasped on her heart, her face raised towards her Maker, with a psalm of joy upon it.

"Alice!" cried Andrew, and held out his arms with a movement which to me expressed the longing of years; and my heart, in the very midst of its joy, dropped down like lead within me when I saw her fly to him and trembling in his arms with happy sobs and laughter.

Parting, they both looked at me almost guiltily. Then Alice, suddenly taking calmness and courage, said—

"You know, Andrew—do you not?—that I am to be Gideon's wife?"

Staggering back, and falling heavily into his chair, Andrew answered—

"I—I had almost forgotten. Yes—yes—the minister told me he hoped so; and I saw when I came in—I saw how it was. Bless thee, Gideon, and thy—thy wife!"

I said nothing, but only stood looking on the misery both tried to conceal; then turning and groping my way to the door, I let myself out, and closed it gently after me.

I was no sooner out alone in the night than the cry went from me—"Lord, why was this cup put to my lips!" And running on recklessly as a maniac in the darkness, I found myself hurrying from one to

another of those spots which were my haunts in the time of my desolation and misery. Wherever I turned, the tempter laughed in my ear—"What! is it thou, Gideon, slipped back so easily from that height it took thee ten years to reach?" For he saw that my soul in its mad jealousy and despair was as desperate to-night as in those times when he knew me so well.

All that night I wandered in the tracks of my past misery, and it seemed to rise up around me like a baleful mist, letting my soul see no light wherever it turned.

Once Andrew came to seek me; but I shook off his hands, crying wildly—

"Leave me!—leave me! For my soul's sake, leave me!"

And I ran from him, and met him no more that night, or ever.

When the morning dawned, loathing its light, I cast myself upon the ground, and cried, "My God! my God!" with a despair which seemed rather to deny than acknowledge the existence of the Being on whom I called.

As I lay there, the warmth of the newly-risen sun, in penetrating my numbed limbs, fell also on my soul

like the touch of a divine and loving hand; and I felt as if one said to me, "Why this trouble, Gideon, though thy cup of earthly joy hath been again dashed from thee? Thou art not left alone in thy misery as in the days before thou didst find me. Dost thou forget whose love thy sorrow and patient service has won? who has been thy comforter—thy hope and thy comforter for these ten years? Canst thou not come back to Him if thou wilt?"

Then, as a child who has dreamed of its mother's death, and wakes to find her standing by its bed, I threw up my arms towards the sun, from whence it seemed to me the voice came, and cried—

"Thou livest!—Thou livest, and my soul shall not die? How could I leave Thy service—I who have verily tasted the divine peace and glory of having but Thee in my heart—but Thy work to my hand? Why did I leave Thee? O God, receive me back!"

Now were the church bells ringing pleasantly in the fresh Christmas morning, and I sat by the two graves on the hill watching the people going into church.

Among the rest went Alice and Andrew, leading my father between them.

When all had passed in, I descended the hill and returned to the cottage of Alice, and finding paper and ink, I sat down and wrote. When I had finished I went out and disposed of my letter. I then again returned and wrote a few words on a scrap of paper, which I took out with me, together with my Bible and staff.

On passing the seat by the church I saw an old man sitting there, and with him I left the scrap of paper, telling him to whom to give it when church should be over.

I ascended the hill again, and sat by the graves, listening to the singing in the church and gazing at Gideon's Rock, now left bare by the tide—gazing at its black, tower-like form, and its finger pointing up.

I sat there till the people began to leave the church, and then rose to watch them.

At last came out the three for whom I looked, and the old man on the seat rose and gave my written message to Andrew. He took it and read it, Alice bending forward to look at it also. The message they found there was—

“Go—at once—to Gideon's Rock.”

When I saw the silent fear with which they gazed

on each other I guessed what their thought was: they were asking themselves if it was my body they would find upon the rock.

Leaving my father on the seat, I saw them hasten together across the shingle and the sands.

I saw them reach the rock, Alice fearing to turn her face towards it, and keeping it turned to Andrew in questioning terror.

There he found my letter, and tearing it open, and holding it down that she might see it with him, read it.

And I watched him, knowing that he read these words:—

“God bless my brother and my sister with all happiness and peace. To leave these undisturbed in their hearts, I do now depart on a journey from which I shall never return. I go to give my life to Him in whose service I had alone found peace. Look up from whence you are to the hill, and wave a last farewell to him who dares not take a closer leave of you for fear of hurting you with the cross he bears.”

Then I saw that they both looked up towards the hill, and did see me, and hastened across the sands as if to follow me. But I waved them back, and they

stood still shading their eyes from the sun to gaze up at me.

The people from the church gathered from their looks and words that I was departing perhaps for ever; and some amongst them were as much moved as when my friend himself went from them, and held up their children to look after me.

These tokens of reconciliation between me and my neighbours, whose forgiveness I had tried so long and vainly to win, were inexpressibly sweet to me.

I looked upon them till I dared to look no more, then turned away and set forth upon my journey in great peace.

That peace I have kept till now that I am writing the last words of this history under the rich forest trees.

I have never again beheld the faces I took leave of that Christmas morning; but my letters bring me pleasant visions of them. I have the happiness and pride of thinking of Andrew as a prosperous, almost a rich, man at Hawkshold, doing his utmost to make its trade better, and to stop the smuggling, to which he had taken an intense dislike.

I had visions also of a giant's gravemound, kept

bright with shells and flowers by the children of Alice, whose heart I can see swell in her motherly bosom as she watches them, and sighs—

“Poor Junk!”

END OF “GIDEON'S ROCK.”

OLD MATTHEW'S PUZZLE.

OLD MATTHEW'S PUZZLE.

BEGIN! Lord bless me, sir, if it doesn't set one's flesh creeping to go hunting up the dead out of the churchyard yonder; for that's what it seems like when I try to bring to my mind all the people that were the pieces of my Puzzle (I always called this tale my Puzzle). Yes, I see them rising up there, like ghosts, between me and the fire. There's broad-shouldered Stephen Trew, with his honest blue eyes. You couldn't look in Stephen's eyes and tell a lie. Ay, and there's Susanna in her bride's dress, all white and silver, holding up her bleeding hand; and there's good old Mr. Gledstyne, with his white hair and ruddy cheeks.

Then there's Gales—he was landlord at the "Pole Arms" before Langley. What's become of his big body, that seemed made on purpose to bend to the great folks? Ay, but old Gales had an oily tongue—a tongue that knew how to talk the last shilling out of a poor man's pocket better than any tongue going. But, steady! they're coming up from the dust faster

than I want them. What have I to do with Gales? No, no; rest where you are, Gales! you've had your share out of us, and the worms are having theirs out of you now. Old Death makes everything even. Not yet, Susanna! I don't want you yet. All in good time.

Now I've got all the pieces of my Puzzle ready, and I'm going to take them and put them together for you just as they came together in real life. Let's see: how far must I go back? But first, try and call to mind a few of the things that happened before the Puzzle began.

You remember Mr. Gledstyne's French wife had an English maid—a Roman Catholic like herself—who, a week after her mistress's wedding, married David Trew. Well, it was about a year afterwards that I first went up as an under-gardener at the Hall, and I do say it was a sin and a shame to see that Martha Trew always away from her home dangling after Mistress Gledstyne in the way she did. Bless you, they used to sit out in the garden with their babies, gossip-gossip, as if they'd been born sisters instead of mistress and maid. They were always talking about their children being so wonderfully alike, though for my part I never could see any difference in babies born within a fortnight of each other.

Then, you know, came the quarrels between Mr. Gledstyne and his wife as to what the boy was to be—Roman Catholic, as his mother insisted on having him; or Protestant, which Mr. Gledstyne declared he should be. Well, presently everything of that kind is forgotten for something more serious. A message comes to Mistress Gledstyne from her sister, who was the wife of some great body—a consul or something, in the West Indies—begging her to go over to her directly, as she was dangerously ill. Yes, yes, Mistress Sicklemore; I'm quite aware, my good lady, you knew all this before. But wait a bit, maybe you'll find presently there was something going on in an under way like, which, begging your pardon, ma'am, you were not quite up to. Well, Mistress Gledstyne sets off by vessel from London, and, after a deal of trouble with Mr. Gledstyne, takes the boy with her. Martha Trew goes with them as far as Plymouth, and takes her boy too. Well, well; you also remember the news coming a few days afterwards about the ship going down in the Channel, with only some half-dozen saved—four men, and a woman and her baby; and this woman was Martha Trew.

Well, as you know, there was a wonderful change in Martha after that. She never seemed to think of

dress and pleasure now, but spent all her time and thought on her boy, and behaved much better to old Trew than ever she had before. It made him feel thankful and yet worried; for it went to his heart to hear her speak so weak and timid—she that used to have such a pert, out-and-out manner—and to see her getting more thin, and white, and scared-looking, every day. But the way she brought up that boy Stephen was a pattern to every mother in the village. Yet it always seemed to me, you know, that she wanted too much of the boy. A scholar he must be—and the best workman in the village. Sometimes she seemed quite to break down like, between the two; and, one day—mark, for here comes in the first bit of the Puzzle—one day, after she had been scolding him for not knowing his lessons, she said, looking into the fire in a dreamy kind of way—

“Poor boy! It’s hard—it’s very hard, to make him fit for both; and yet——”

There she caught my eye upon her, and coloured up, and turned white again, in a way that set me thinking over her words as I should never have done else.

That was the first bit of the Puzzle that got into my head. Stephen was then twelve years old, and it

was ten years more before I came upon the next bit. Yet all that time I could never meet Martha's suspicious eye without thinking of the change that had come over her since she went to Plymouth with Mistress Gledstyne. Yes, it was ten years before I came upon the next bit of my Puzzle, or rather the next two bits, for I had them both in my head at once, and they were—what should you think?—why, an old workshop and a pretty woman!

Well, I think we'll take a jump over that ten years; just remembering what passed. Let's see what had passed by the time Stephen was twenty-two.

First of all, he had served his apprenticeship at Pringley's the carpenter's, and came out the first workman in the place. Martha wouldn't let him be apprenticed till Mr. Gledstyne advised her. I noticed that too. In the next place, old Trew had gone off in a fit, and poor Martha got more and more nervous and ailing every day, and at last couldn't move from her chair in the chimney corner. What the poor soul would have done without Susanna the niece, whom she had taken when her mother died, I don't know. Next thing, Master Stephen must go falling over head

and ears in love with this Susanna. At first she only played fast and loose with him, as she did with all the chaps who were fools enough to have anything to do with her.

She was reckoned a beauty though, in our day; but she was always too much like a fine white cat to please me. She'd a nice figure enough though, straight and lissome, and a neat-turned ankle; yes, she had. I can see her now as she used to walk down the village past the works when she thought Pringley's men were looking after her. She stepped like a dancer in her thin light boots. You never heard her coming,—she'd glide up to you like a cat. She used to wear a violet-coloured shawl to show off her fair complexion. That's the one fault I could never forget. She was too fair—much too fair. Her eyes were good—clear pale blue; but her eyelashes and brows were so light that it almost seemed as if she had none. Her low, straight forehead was so white, that you could see the little blue veins in her temple; and when she was upset those veins would swell till they were dark purple. There wasn't a bit of real colour in her face, except her lips, which were so thin that they only looked like a straight line of blood between her nose and chin. She had light tawny-

coloured hair turned off her face in Mistress Gledstyne's style, and little round curls like rings plastered on her cheeks. She wore a bonnet open at the ears to show off the long gold earrings which Mistress Gledstyne gave Martha, and a little black-spotted veil pinned close over her face. She used to lay her arms one over the other in front of her, so as to show the white hands with long-pointed fingers, such as ladies have; and she had a way always of looking round sideways out of the corners of her eyes, as if she fancied she was being watched or followed.

Well, as I said, at first Susanna treated Stephen in the same way she treated scores of others whose heads were turned by her tiger-lily hair and pale eyes: but by-and-by she turns over quite a fresh leaf; becomes kindness itself to Martha; is never seen walking out with anyone but Stephen; and seems bent heart and soul on pleasing him: making him think her a perfect angel.

And now as to these next pieces of my Puzzle. One evening I had dropped in to see how poor Martha was. I was sitting in the chimney opposite to her, and Susanna was at the window watering the flowers. All of a sudden she set down the can, and called out—

"Aunt! aunt! There's a fire in Tanfield! Good gracious! it must be Stephen's workshop. Yes, that it is!"

Martha turned sharply round, and I stared as if I'd seen a ghost when I saw her rise straight up, and, holding on by the table, walk to the window. The fire flamed out bright and high—then sunk—and we saw through the smoke that the little workshop had not been touched; it was only the hayrick beside it had caught fire. Martha seemed to lose her new strength with her fright; she slid down on her knees and muttered to herself—

"My God! if it had been! Oh, if it had been! If I could never have righted him! Oh, I thought it was a judgment on me for my delay."

I went home. I turned my first bit of the Puzzle over and over, but couldn't fit it with this, though it seemed somehow to belong to it. Then I couldn't help mixing Susanna up with it all. Her sudden change to Stephen—her strange look at Martha when the rick was on fire—so ran in my head that I said, to myself, I shouldn't be surprised but what Susanna turns out a very important piece of the Puzzle. So from that time I kept my eye upon her pretty closely, I can tell you.

One day, when Stephen came in to his tea, the little room was filled with neighbours, and there was a smell of doctor's stuff—so that he wasn't much surprised when he saw the poor thin figure stretched on the settle; and he went and stood at her feet, and a strange pain shot through him as he looked at the pale face and staring eyes, that seemed to see something awful in the whitewashed wall. Susanna was leaning close over her. Stephen pushed her aside, and turned to the neighbours and said—

“Thanks for your help, neighbours; but I'm at home now, so it won't be needed any more; and what she's got to say now is for her own kith and kin to hear, and nobody else.”

So one by one they dropped out.

Stephen took his mother's hand; it was so cold and damp that the touch made him shiver. She still kept staring at the wall in that dreadful vacant way, and presently she said, in a hollow voice—

“Ask her what it is she's wanting of me. Haven't I done all I can—now that it is so late? O Steenie! Steenie! tell her to keep her heavy wet hands off me!”

Then she cowered low—her head on Stephen's arm, and lay still, looking at something beyond him.

Stephen looked over his shoulder, and was surprised to see Susanna standing there; he thought he was alone with his mother. After a little while he said to her—

“She's asleep; go up to bed, Susanna; I'll watch.”

“Are you sure she's asleep, Stephen?” says Susanna; “I think I'll wait a bit longer;” and she sat down close by Martha.

Stephen went and stood by the fire; Martha's words had made him anxious for her. It was plain that what the neighbours whispered about her having something on her mind must be true, and he wished Susanna would go away and leave them alone.

Presently Martha started up on her elbow, and said, in the same strange, hollow voice—

“Don't curse me! Oh, sir, haven't I brought him up almost as well as you could have done? But why should he ever know? Susanna! Susanna! don't go yet! Why should he ever know?”

Then she put both her hands to her head, and muttered—

“Ay! but that letter—that letter and that hair! I

dare not burn them. Yet, why shouldn't I? Who's to know, unless the sea can give up its dead?"

Stephen looked up and met Susanna's eye, that was fixed on him in a strange, uneasy way, and she said—

"Why cannot I watch, Stephen? It's not so bad for me to hear her raving like this as it is for you. Poor thing! it's all coming back to her about her young days, and the sweetheart that was drowned at sea."

"No, Susanna; I would rather you left us alone. You had best go to bed," Stephen said, in a determined sort of way. He didn't care about having his mother's troubles spoken of so even before Susanna.

Susanna moved about, smoothing the pillows and drawing the window-curtains, and doing half a dozen more little things that she seemed double the time over she need have been. At last, after Stephen had spoken to her again, she took her candle and went upstairs. Again did Stephen sit down by the fire, and he found himself listening heart and soul for his mother's next words. Martha was sitting up, rocking to and fro as if quieting a child. Presently she laid her hand on her forehead, and said, looking round at Stephen—

“Who was it said my boy was sick—dying? Look at him—see him on his feet! Does he look sick, David Trew—or dying, think you?”

Now, all this time Stephen sat looking into the fire. He saw a picture there. At first it was all dim and smoky, and the figures were huddled together; but by-and-by, as Martha still went on in her light-headed, rambling way, his picture cleared, and cleared, till at last he got so intent upon it, that he rose up from his chair and stood staring at it, with his heart beating as if it would burst.

Once he went to the window, and looked at the fir plantations round the Hall, lying black on the side of the hill under the moon. Then he looked at his scarred, hard-worked hands, and then at the thin figure on the settle—and his heart was very bitter against her.

Soon Martha raised herself up a bit, and stared round the room, and said—

“Has he been told yet? Will he come? O Stephen, my boy, my boy! You won't curse me if he should come? I have been all that a mother could be to you, haven't I?”

He couldn't answer her—he couldn't speak; there was such a choking in his throat.

"Steenie," Martha said, in her own, natural voice, only very faint—"Steenie, come to me! I want to tell you a story."

Stephen went and stood by her, and a pain shot through him as he felt he was watching her dull eyes and white face—in such wild fear, not of losing his mother, but only of losing what she had to tell him. Yes, that's all he thought of at that minute, as he saw her trying to speak with her last breath; and that made him, when he found she couldn't, grip hold of her arm and say, in a voice low and hoarse, and shaking with passion—

"Mother! mother! Don't leave me like this! Before God, *are* you my mother?"

She did not breathe; yet still he gripped her arm and bent over her, and fixed his eyes on her face as if he would keep her against death—against anything, till she answered him. And the minutes went by without either moving a muscle. The white face grew drawn and fixed, and the tears that had come into the eyes when Stephen cried out so fiercely to know the truth, seemed to freeze there. At last he dropped the arm—and the clenched hand fell with a dead, heavy knock on the floor.

Martha Trew was dead!

Stephen knew it; and, in his madness at being shut out of the secret for ever, he could have shouted to the poor weary spirit that was turning to its rest, to come back and give him justice and amends. But by-and-by, as he kept looking at her with bitterness in his heart, his great loss came slowly and heavily over him, crushing every other feeling. He didn't move, but stood looking at the drawn mouth that had kissed him, and sang to him, and taught him, and the bony hand that had striven and worked for him—and two hot tears came rolling down his cheeks.

He forgot all about his picture now, and everything else in the world but his great loss. He was Martha's boy again, and she was his mother—his own mother; and she lay there dead! and a trouble was on her soul! He knelt down and kissed the grey hair on the pillow, and cried over it; and he buried his face in her breast, and stretched his arms over her, and clung about her as helpless as when he was a little child, looking up to her and saying, "Mother, take me!"

But Stephen was strong; and, though human nature will be human nature, he soon got the master-hand over his passion, and held it down like; and folding his hands together, and shutting his eyes to get into

the darkness where she was, he tried to fancy himself by her side before the Judge, and he said—

“Master, take the burden from the weak workman, and lay it on the strong—take her debts from her, and make me debtor of them.”

Poor Stephen, he little knew how fearfully all her wrong-doing *would* be visited on him in days to come.

When he got up from his knees the candle had burnt out, and the room was pitch-dark; so he stretched himself on the floor by the settle, and drew a corner down of the old shawl she was wrapped in, and laid his forehead on it; and the two slept side by side—the living and the dead.

Ah, Martha Trew! you didn't deserve to look back on the lad you had wronged so, and find him taking more comfort in a bit of the shawl your dead body's wrapped in than in the whole world. No, you didn't deserve it, if you did slave and toil, and give your soul for him.

So she was dead! Was the secret dead too? Dead, to go to dust with her heart—dead, never again to unsettle him it concerned? Ay, that's what I asked myself when I heard all this. Was it so? or had it

passed from her to another? Did it still live in a living heart—and whose?

You shall hear.

Stephen, you remember, gave up Martha's cottage to Susanna, and came to live with me at the Lodge belonging to the Hall. Now, we were the two worst ones in the world to live together and have secrets from one another; so it wasn't long before he told me all I've just told you. And we talked over the Puzzle together often,—and very quiet and keen Stephen was about it, never letting himself hope too much, and yet not shutting his eyes to anything, except when we happened to turn the light on Susanna,—that he always put a stop to instantly.

Well; one Sunday night, when Stephen came in from one of his moonlight walks with Susanna, I thought he seemed a good deal excited, and asked him what was the matter? "Matter! nothing—what should be the matter?" he said tartly, and then sat down by the window and leant his head on his arm. But Stephen would sooner cut off his right hand—and he'd have cut off a good business with it, mind you—than he'd let a lie get an hour old, if one passed his lips; so in a minute or two he looks up and says—

"What do you think I've been doing this Sunday evening, Matthew? I've been taking an oath on my mother's Bible, and I've written the oath under her name."

He said it in a cool desperate kind of way, as much as to say—"It was wrong; but it's done now, and it's no good your bothering about it."

"Taking an oath, Stephen!" I said; "then it's to be hoped it's one you'll never repent, for you'd follow it if it led you to ruin."

"Yes, I'll keep it," said Stephen, quietly and firmly. Then he laughed and said, as he took up his candle—

"It won't be so very difficult to keep though, and it won't lead to ruin exactly."

"You have sworn to marry Susanna! Isn't that it, Stephen?" I said.

He just nodded,—and I saw his hand shake as he lit his candle by mine.

"Stephen," I said, looking hard at him by the light of both, "you didn't do that coolly, and of your own free will."

"I should hope I did though," said he, with a forced kind of laugh.

"Then I'm very sorry it's happened, Stephen Trew," I said; and I said it from my heart.

He didn't fly out at me as I expected, and as he always did when I said anything against Susanna, but stood still, kicking at a hole in my carpet with his heel.

"How was it?" I asked him at last, for he seemed to want to speak.

"Oh, she vexed me with keeping on so about my casting her off if I happened to get a bit higher in the world."

"Indeed," thinks I, "cunning as usual, Miss Susanna." "Well, Stephen?"

"At last," said Stephen, "after I had sworn over and over again that nothing 'ud ever make me change, she held up the Bible and said, half laughing, 'I dare you to write your oath in this, Stephen!' At first I didn't like to; but she in a way taunted me into it,—so I took out my measuring-pencil, and it was done before I gave it a second thought."

"What did you write, Stephen?" I asked him.

"I wrote what she told me," said he—"I, Stephen Trew, swear by this book, that, come what may, I do consider Susanna Ford my affianced wife."

"And she told you to write just that?"

Again he nodded.

"Stephen!" I said, dashing my pipe to pieces under the grate, "that woman's an artful, scheming witch! Take my word for it there's something at the bottom of her fine doubts and misgivings. There's some secret in her hands, which, if I were you, I'd shake out of her somehow or other. Why, you can't be blind to it, man? It's as clear as daylight."

Stephen turned full on me, and brought his hand down heavily on my shoulder.

"Matthew Mucklethrift," says he, a little hoarsely, "if you speak another word against her I shall be forgetting you're an old man, and——But I'll say no more about it now, only this—remember, whatever happens, I look on her as my wife, and whoever insults her insults me. You know what I've done—you know I can't draw back. Let's hear no more about it. Here's my hand, Matthew; you're my best friend, and I shouldn't like this to part us,—only, don't say a word more against her."

We shook hands, but from that time I worked at the Puzzle alone.

Well, the wedding-day came round. It was New Year's eve—and a black New Year's eve it was too.

When I opened the Lodge door before it was quite light in the morning, the first thing I saw was a single crow flying over from the trees behind Susanna's cottage to the Hall. It stopped in front for an instant, and clapped its great black wings; then perched on the gable just over Mr. Gledstyne's bedroom window. I shook my head as I saw it, and watched Stephen go off in his fine clothes. He made me promise I'd hobble down to the village to see the dancing, if my rheumatism would let me.

Well, about seven in the evening I went. They'd got the old room where Martha died done up in grand style. Tommy Grimes stood up on the settle fiddling away for his life; and the girls were all dressed out in their best, and chattering—lor! you could scarcely hear a squeak of Tommy's fiddle.

Presently came Susanna gliding down the room to speak to me. I looked at her from head to foot. I looked at her well; and if ever a woman looked like an angel from the wrong place Stephen's bride did, as she tried to stare me out with those pale blue eyes of hers. Now, you could see that Susanna had determined not to dress like a common village girl; but for once in her life she had overstepped her mark, for she was dressed more like a stage princess than a lady. She

had made herself a dress out of a grand thing that Martha once showed me, and told me had been a Court-dress of Mistress Gledstyne's. It had broad silver stripes down it; and as Susanna went sliding and gliding, and twisting and turning, in the dance, she looked more than ever like a splendid white woman-snake—all glitter, and shine, and softness. Her shoulders quite dazzled one as her veil flew back; and as the others got hot and red, she seemed to grow colder and whiter, and more light of foot, every minute.

As for Stephen, he was always fond of dancing; but to-night he was as if he couldn't stop still an instant. At last, after he had danced with every girl in the room, and frightened two or three old bodies out of their wits by catching 'em up and whirling 'em round till they didn't know whether they stood on their heads or their feet, he came and sat down by me, near the door. I could see that his eyes, like mine, followed the silver stripes and fluttering veil in and out among the gaudy dresses. Perhaps he noticed, as well as me, that there was something odd and unusual in Susanna's manner that night. Though she danced with anybody that asked her, she somehow didn't seem like one of the rest, but held her head up, and gave her hand gingerly, like a grand lady

who had just stepped down from her drawing-room to please the poor people by mixing a few minutes in the dance.

Well, they were all tearing about like mad, and dancing too hard for any chattering to go on the while, and Tommy's fiddle sounded bravely, when the door opened, and Mr. Gledstyne's man John put his head in.

"Why, that's a long face to come to a wedding feast with, John," says I. "What's the matter?"

"Matthew," says he, "you're wanted directly; Master's fell from his horse and broke his leg! The doctor doesn't think he'll get over it. He said he should like to see all his servants, and had us up. You're the only one that was away, and he's sent me to fetch you."

I told him I'd be after him directly; and as I turned to ask Stephen to get my stick from the chimney-corner, I found the silver stripes quite close to me; and looking up, I could see Susanna had heard something that had interested her.

When Stephen came with my stick, he whispered, "Say good night to Susanna, and wish her well."

I turned round to where she had stood half a minute ago, between me and the open door, and she

was gone. Pass me she certainly never had done; no, she had gone out, bitterly cold as it was, in her thin wedding-clothes.

But Stephen laughed, and looked all round the room before he would believe it. When he couldn't doubt it any more, he came to me, and said, with a troubled, suspicious face—

“Matthew, tell me—did she hear about Mr. Gledstyne?”

I told him I thought by the look of her face she had heard.

“Then where do you think she has gone?” he asked in a whisper.

I thought of the second bit of my Puzzle, and said—

“The workshop! Take my advice, Stephen, get there by the nearest cut, and watch round it.” And I went my way up to the Hall, leaving him to do as he chose. Well, as I want to tell you just how things worked round, I must tell you about him first.

He went. It was a strange night—one minute pitch-dark, and another clear moonlight. With a sick feeling at his heart, he took the key from where it hung just inside the little window, jerked it round in the rusty lock, and shutting the door, hung the key back in

its place. Then he stood, not knowing what to do—leaning his back against the door, and asking himself if he wasn't a fool for taking such strange advice.

By-and-by, as he stood there with his eyes fixed upon the ground, it struck him all at once that there were two kinds of light flickering over it. Yes, Mistress Sicklemore, you may well look behind you, for it's a queer bit I'm coming to now. Well, suddenly lifting his eyes to see where the other light came from, Stephen saw something that made him clutch the bench with his fingers, and turned his face to the colour of death.

There, at the little window with the one broken pane, moving slowly up and down on the right-hand side—as if feeling for the key—was a hand—a woman's hand—thin and long, and of a bluish white, with a light from a lantern shining through at the red nails. The wrist didn't move, because of the thin sharp points of glass that stuck up all round, but kept still, while the fingers felt about. Presently, the arm was pushed in nearly to the elbow, and the light outside was raised a little.

A horrible feeling came over Stephen as he was obliged to own that he knew that white hand—that

he had touched it—that those horrid, creeping, feeling fingers had been tangled in his hair; that that ring shining round one of them had been placed there by him, with vows that put his whole fate into that hateful hand. And mark! not only did Stephen know it as his bride's hand, but as he watched it with loathing and fascinated eyes, he knew it to be the hand that for years had been tangling a kind of web about him so quietly and secretly, that he never knew it till he felt himself bound hand and foot. As he looked, and looked, he let out the breath that was stifling him in a quick sort of gasp. He was heard! The hand moved up with a sudden jerk, and caught in the longest point of jagged glass at the top. It *did* seem alive then. There was a little half-smothered scream that seemed to come from it; and each nail seemed like a red eye glaring at Stephen. He laid hold of the bench, and drew himself up stiffly; but when he saw the blood dripping from the pointed tips of the fingers, his head reeled, and to save himself from falling he sank down close behind the door, so that if it opened, he would be completely hidden, by it on one side, and the planks on the other. He kept his eyes on the window still; and, as he had felt sure it would, after listening and hearing no sound the hand returned, and this

time succeeded in reaching the key. Then he heard a soft scrunching noise coming round the shed, like light feet on the snow—and got further behind the planks, that stood longways against the wall and a little apart, so that he could see through the cracks. Well, the key turns, and the door opens, and *she* comes in with a lantern in her hand. With a dreadful beating at his heart he saw the tall figure, shining in its satin and silver stripes, glide up to a corner and begin moving something from the wall. While she clutched and clutched at the brick, she once turned her head in the old cautious way over her shoulder, and, without her knowing it, their eyes met. Stephen shut his with a shudder—then opened them, and fixed them upon her again.

After a few minutes' more patient cat-like working she turned and glided out, with a smile on her face and something wrapped in a corner of her veil.

Stephen staggered out after her, and saw her turn in the direction of the Hall.

Well, when I got up to the Hall, after leaving Stephen, I found Mr. Gledstyne a good deal better. He was stretched on the sofa in the study. The doctor had just left him, and I found him alone. I could

see he was half distracted with pain, yet he tried so hard to speak in his old jolly way that it brought the tears in my eyes to hear him.

"Shan't be able to lead the dance to-night, Matthew," says he. "I'm sorry, for I haven't missed dancing at one of the last five weddings we've had—and——"

I didn't catch what else he said, for I was listening to a voice at the door—a voice I thought I knew by the way it hissed out every word, as if it were all essses.

"I tell you I must see Mr. Gledstyne!" says the voice.

"It's no good asking him," said Mr. Gledstyne's man John; "he's too bad to see anybody."

"I must see him! If he's dying I must see him!" says the voice, loud and distinct.

"What is it? What's the matter, John?" asks Mr. Gledstyne fretfully.

Then says the voice, in a long, low hiss—

"Tell him MISTRESS GLEDSTYNE wants to speak to him!"

Mr. Gledstyne gave a sort of cry, and started up, and with his head stuck forward, stared towards the door. I, too, leant forward in my chair, and strained

my eyes through the firelight. I heard no step coming, but I heard a soft rustling—and I knocked the end of the log into the hollow part of the fire, and so threw a bright red light upon the figure standing in the middle of the room. I hardly noticed at the time that her left hand was bleeding, through the veil it was wrapped in, all over her fine dress—for my whole mind was taken up with the Puzzle, and with watching what she was going to do next—how she meant to prove her right to that name—which was all a mystery to me. She was now standing by Mr. Gledstyne's sofa, answering with a cool, impudent look his frightened gaze.

“What do you mean? What are you doing with my name?” he gasped out, livid with anger—for it had been a terrible shock to him; he had half expected to see his drowned wife, and he felt enraged beyond everything against this woman, who he thought had played upon him for amusement.

Susanna kept her eyes on his in the same impudent way, as she said, with a half smile, but a shaky voice—

“It is my name too, sir; and I have every right to it.”

"What do you mean, woman? Speak!" he shouted, trembling in every limb.

"I mean, Mr. Gledstyne," said Susanna slowly, folding her arms and looking down upon him, "that I am your son's wife."

"*My* son's!" he muttered. "Mad woman!"

"Yes, Mr. Gledstyne," says she, holding out a yellow-looking letter to him; "Stephen Trew is your own son, as this will show you."

Mr. Gledstyne took the letter in his shaking hand and read, while Susanna's eyes darted about, first on one grand piece of furniture, then on another, and then on his face, still with that strange smile of hers curling her thin lips. I've read it a good many times since then, and I think I've got the sense of it pretty well; and what I've forgot, you won't miss. Let's see how did it begin?—ay, ay, I've got it now:—

"On board the *Reachland*,
Wednesday Evening.

"I am settled in the ship; Vernon and Martha leave me to-morrow. Yes, to-morrow I shall be alone. I am very miserable. I don't know why—for after all it is not much to cross this sea. I did not think it so when I crossed it with you—to go to your

home and all that I am now leaving—and I cannot tell why I shudder at it now. Yet a fear has been over me ever since my foot left the land, that it would never touch it more. But I did not sit down to write to you of this, but of our child. It shall be as you wish—Martha shall take him back to you to-morrow. Poor girl—now that she has lost hers, she clings more than ever to little Vernon. Say a kind word to her, will you not, and let her see him often?

“There then, I have promised; but how shall I—oh, how shall I part with him—my darling? He is lying on my neck now, with one little hand twisted in my hair, and the other stroking my wet cheek. Perhaps he wonders why it is wet, as he looks up at me with those eyes of yours. He little thinks it is because when I have folded this I shall lay him in Martha's arms—perhaps never to take him back. Who can tell? How tightly he has twisted his hand about my hair. When Martha takes him, I will cut the piece off as he holds it, and he shall bring it to you in his hand; it will show you a little, perhaps, how he is twined about my heart, and how much of that—the best—will be dragged and torn away from this ship to the shore, as I see him there in Martha's arms, and the miles growing and growing between us.

"I have taken the cross from his neck—you know what that means—and have bought him one of your Bibles—a very pretty one you see, with bright clasps, that he may take to it early. Try, Vernon, to realise what it is I give up to you, and think of me once more as you used.

"Martha has come, and my trial; and I have not said one-half that I wished to say. You will not forget to be kind to Martha.

"Farewell! Would that I had never begun this journey!

"AMY GLEDSTYNE."

As Mr. Gledstyne finished reading this letter, Susanna undid the rusty clasps of a Bible she took from her pocket, and opening it, showed a knot of hair. It was dark and tangled; you could fancy that the little stubborn baby's fist had only just let go of it. Mr. Gledstyne took the Bible, and looked down upon the hair, till a mist gathered over his eyes.

"Matthew," he said, with a trembling voice, "send for him; send for Stephen Trew."

So I went out and spoke to John, for I felt afraid, somehow, of leaving my poor master alone with that snake, Susanna, or I should have gone for Stephen

myself, and prepared him for all. When I came back, Mr. Gledstyne was reading another worn letter; it was from that poor soul, Martha. I'll tell it you, as well as I can recollect:—

“By the time Stephen will have come to you with this and my mistress's letter, and it is made known to you what I have done, I shall have met her, my mistress, face to face, and she will have asked me about her last message. You will not know before then; because, after all, I have given your boy my life, my whole care; and how could I die any other to him than I have lived—his mother? I do not ask you to forgive me, Mr. Gledstyne; I cannot expect forgiveness; but I ask you to believe it was love for the boy made me do what I did, and that—that same love brought me my punishment. I have never known a day's peace since I took him home in my arms—clinging to me as if his life hung upon mine—and it wasn't nature to part us. Yes, my love was indeed my punishment. It grew and grew in me every day; but if at any time I would forget and give way to it, and try to fancy it my own, I seemed to see *her* standing between me and the child, looking through her wet hair, as she looked when her body rose in •

the waves that night, and to hear her saying—‘He is mine, Martha Trew; he is mine!’ and I’ve had to call up a hard word to my mouth, and to see the boy turning away from me afraid, with the tears in his eyes, when all the time I’d been longing to snatch him up in my arms. You’ll remember that. Please—please remember that, Mr. Gledstyne, and don’t be too hard on me, nor let him, my Steenie, be too hard on—it’s a bitter word to write, but never mind; he’ll never see her after he reads it—his nurse.

“MARTHA TREW.”

“Well,” said Mr. Gledstyne, when he had read it, “and who did Martha trust this to—you?”

“Me!” said Susanna, boldly; “why I never dreamed of Stephen being anything but a poor working man till this very night, when I found these things in a chest of Aunt Martha’s I never opened before. She might have meant to—I think she did—but she was light-headed some weeks before she died, and didn’t know what she said. No, sir,”—(she went on drawing up her long figure till her shadow on the wall touched the ceiling)—“I should never have married Stephen if I had known.”

While Susanna said this, I noticed that her lips

grew white and her fingers twitched, as if she longed to snatch Martha's letter from Mr. Gledstyne's hands.

Just then the hounds set up a barking, and the Lodge-bell rang. Mr. Gledstyne looked at his son's wife, and pointing to the great doors of the drawing-room, said in a cold, polite, but hurried sort of way—

“Will you please to walk in there while I speak to Stephen? I hear he has come.”

With another uneasy look at the letter, which Mr. Gledstyne noticed, she smiled and bent her head, and went into the great dark drawing-room, and closed the door after her, as Stephen was shown in at the other door. He stood there a minute with his cap in his hand, till Mr. Gledstyne said—

“Come here, Stephen!”

So he went and stood by him, and Mr. Gledstyne gave him his wife's letter, and watched him while he read it, with tears rolling down his cheeks into his white beard. It was the first time I had ever seen him so, and I made a fool of myself, so that I couldn't see any more, till Stephen had placed the letter on the pillow and taken up the hair and laid it tenderly on the back of his hand, as if it were too silky and delicate to touch with his rough fingers. Then he laid

that back on the letter—ay, the hand had brought the hair at last; but it had grown and roughened a bit on the journey.

Mr. Gledstyne took both of Stephen's hands in his, and looked up in his face, waiting to see the change come over it. But it never altered. Stephen seemed to shrink more and more into himself as he stood there—the workman still (for he couldn't throw off the old life all in a minute), looking at his coarse hands lying in Mr. Gledstyne's, and he felt ashamed.

Mr. Gledstyne looked anxious. No doubt it came across him: Was his son so much a carpenter that his heart had hardened to what he worked in, that he stood there like a block, so dull and stupid? He could not bear that—No! better to have never known he was his son. He let go his hands, and opened his arms wide, and said—

“My boy! my boy!”

There was a great cry from Stephen, hoarse and strong—and a heavy fall that shook the floor: and I stopped my ears. I don't know if it was right to have heard all I did; but I wouldn't hear any more. I saw Stephen's head strained to his father's breast, with his cheek on his mother's hair and letter—and that was

enough. I stopped my ears to shut out the two men's sobs.

"Are you there, Matthew?" Mr. Gledstyne said at last—his deep voice as faint and sweet as a woman's: "are you there? My boy says you have been a true friend to him. Come, stir up the fire, man, and let's have a look at him!"

And I did; but it was too bad for even him to look Stephen in the face just then.

"Yes," says he, as he put his hands on his broad shoulders, and held him off. "Yes, it's Amy's boy, sure enough. Ay, they've robbed us of each other all these years, but they couldn't do us much harm. I'm not a whit the less proud of you, my boy—no, not a whit, for your having been Stephen Trew!"

Mr. Gledstyne fell back, white as death.

"See if there's any brandy in there," said I to Stephen; "I'll go down and see if the doctor's gone."

Susanna stood there as he opened the drawing-room door, but he rushed past, taking no notice of her, and she came in and stood looking at Mr. Gledstyne in such a strange way that, hardly knowing what I was about, I touched Stephen's arm and pointed to a great looking-glass in the drawing-room opposite the open door, and in which we could see the corner of the

study where Mr. Gledstyne lay. He was looking at the end of the last page of Martha's letter, and Susanna's fingers twitched and her eyes glared upon him, and she quietly went nearer and nearer to him, as he held up the leaf so as to see through it by the fire-light. Suddenly looking up, he found her close beside him.

"Liar!" he hissed out through his clenched teeth and ashy lips, "I have found you out. This line of writing that has been scratched and meddled with is—"*"Susanna knows all! May she with God's blessing right those that I have wronged. Stephen! Stephen! I say."*

I think Stephen would have fallen if it hadn't been for my poor rheumatic arm. Still we could not move; our eyes seemed riveted on the glass by the strange, almost devilish smile on Susanna's face, as she stood looking down upon him.

"Have you found me out?" she said, in that low whisper of hers, that almost froze my blood to hear; "and will you tell Stephen? Will you? Will you? *Dare* you?"

"Stephen! Help!"

As we hurried in together Susanna passed us,

gliding along with her cat-like step, and sat down in the old state chair by the fire in the drawing-room.

Mr. Gledstyne lay back upon the pillow—*dead!*

“Were we dreaming?” whispered Stephen, passing his hand over his clammy brow, “or did—did that horrible hand touch him? Look here, Matthew, look!”

He drew something from his father's clenched hand. Holding it up and spreading it out, we saw it was a corner of flimsy lace—a piece of Susanna's veil. Now mind! I tell you, as I told Stephen at the time, I don't believe she meant to do more than stop him telling Stephen about those scratched-out lines, but stopping his breath for an instant, in the state he was in, was enough to stop it for ever. Stephen stood looking at it for full three minutes before he could take in the horrible truth. Then he strode to the drawing-room door, and stood looking round the room with his wild eyes and lips as white and as firm-set as the dead man's.

Susanna did not see him—she was standing with her back to us, looking up at the splendid pictures and mirrors which covered that side of the wall. Presently she spread her arms out, and said to herself, looking up and down the wall—

“Mine! mine! everything—all mine!”

My heart misgave me as to what Stephen was going to do—he looked at her so fixedly and long. I knew how much greater his hate must be for having loved her so, and now I trembled for her, tigress as she was. At last he went into the room, and, without taking any notice of Susanna, took hold of the bell-rope and pulled it violently without stopping till all the servants, who had heard something from John of what was going on, came hurrying to the door.

Susanna stared, half stupefied, wondering what he was going to do.

As Stephen stepped forward towards them, I saw two or three started as I did, to see how like he was just now—with his stern, pale face—to the portraits of the two last Squires hanging on the wall.

“You have heard what has passed to-night—you know who I am, John?” he said, drawing himself up, as if he were proud of his inheritance, poor fellow!

“Yes, God bless you, sir!” said the old butler, with tears in his eyes. “I know you’re the master of this house—and we’ve all known you, sir, just as if you’d been brought up in it—and we wouldn’t wish for a better master, seeing the Squire’s took away from us.”

And the women all curtsied to Stephen, but sent

looks of dislike to Susanna, who stood drawn up in her fine dress, trying to look very grand and high, but trembling all the while to hear what he was going to say to them. A pink spot came on each cheek, and the little blue veins in her temples swelled as if they'd burst, when Stephen stretched out his arm and pointed at her, and said—

“Very well, then. That is my wife, the mistress of this house; and I command you to obey her every word—to wait upon her hand and foot. You know this is our wedding-night. Light the candles in the state bedroom—take her there and wait upon her. If I do not come in less than an hour, fetch me; I shall be in the study with my father—mind, I say—fetch me.”

Mistress Susanna Gledstytne stood looking at her fine figure, at full length, in a dressing-glass in the old state bedroom.

After making the women try on all the faded finery in the wardrobes, she had chosen to be dressed in a loose white gown of Indian muslin, and now she was arranging a large flower, made of jewels, in her tawny hair.

She stood looking at herself with a great flaming

wax-light on each side the glass, waiting for the bridegroom to come—for the hour was past.

Perhaps she was thinking of the family diamonds that Mr. Gledstyne's sister, Miss Mirabel, went to Court in, and wondering how soon they would be put into her hands. At any rate, she was tired of walking through the old house, and ringing the bells to see how often the servants would answer to her call. She was tired of scribbling "Susanna Gledstyne" on the blank leaves of books on the drawing-room table—almost tired of looking at her own white face.

Suddenly, she hears footsteps coming up the stairs and along the passage. The outer door of the bedroom creaks, and two women come and draw aside the heavy curtains, and hold them back—and Mistress Gledstyne turns to meet the bridegroom. But first come two men bearing lights, who wait at the door and look back; then, more heavy, shuffling feet, and another two come in, carrying a man's body by the feet and arms. The blood is pouring from his side, and, just as he is, they lift him on the bed—the bridal bed.

We had gone to the study at the end of the hour. I had opened the door as quietly as I could, and saw Stephen kneeling by his father's side. He was looking

at something he held in his hand. At first I didn't notice what (it was one of the old pistols that were always kept loaded on the sideboard); but I was struck all of a heap like, by the sight of his face! Poor Stephen! Even at a time like that he bore the truth on his face; for though I hadn't seen the pistol, I could have told what he was meaning to do. At one instant, through the determined look, the face was sad and tender, as if he were giving a last thought to his father and his own mother, and her to whom he was related by a tie as strong as that of blood—poor Martha Trew. Then there seemed to come over him, like a flash, a thought of the greatness and happiness that might have been his; and his face grew so strange and fierce that I thought the time had come to save him from himself, and two of us rushed in. But as soon as he saw us he leapt to his feet, turned the pistol against his heart, and fired! I had knocked the pistol upwards a few inches as he fired, and the ball entered the shoulder. He gave a low moan, and fell fainting against the sofa; and, just as he was, we lifted him up and carried him in to Susanna.

By this time all sorts of wild stories had spread over the village. Crowds had got round the house, and some of those who had been drinking hard at the

wedding-feast, and had only got some muddled idea of Stephen's good luck, were shouting under the window and throwing up their caps; while poor women who had heard that Mr. Gledstyne was dead, cried and wrung their hands, and declared ruin must come upon them. The magistrate and the clergyman, and two or three more of Mr. Gledstyne's friends, came into the room where we were, and questioned us.

Mistress Gledstyne took no notice of anything but Stephen. She stood at the bedside, holding the curtain back with one hand, and her beautiful hair with the other; while the smile that she wore when she turned to meet the bridegroom seemed frozen on her face. For nearly five minutes she stood so. Then she put her foot on the steps, and set one knee on the bed, still smiling so awfully as she looked down upon him. Her eyes were like two cold, polished stones, and in the hollow of each a great tear lay glittering.

At last, as Stephen began to revive, you could see sense coming slowly into her face, and her white lips moved with a piteous, weak kind of cry—

“Stephen! Stephen! What have you done?”

Stephen started up with a shrill scream—almost like a woman's scream it was—and drops of sweat came out thick on his forehead.

“O God!” he said, looking round, “she is here again! I thought I’d got away from her for ever. Help me! help me! Look! she is going to kill me as she killed him!”

She was only stretching her clasped hands in a beseeching way towards him, but when she heard his last words, and saw him sink fainting on the pillow, she shrank back and slid from the bed. Stephen’s words seemed to decide the magistrate, who had been hearing the servants’ strange stories about her, and he signed to two of them to lock her in one of the rooms till he could learn more. There was something terrible in Susanna’s cowardly fright. She glided between the two men like an eel, and stood panting and glaring round her at the foot of the bed. All her cunning, all her bravado, had come to an end; and now her brain seemed turning as she looked round and saw the finish of her work. She, standing there robed and jewelled, the lady of Gledstyne Hall; her husband dying by his own hand, which he had lifted against himself to be freed from her; the grand gentlemen, from whom she had thought to command respect and admiration, looking down upon her with disgust and horror; the poor people—her own people, she had thought to rise above and crush under her dainty heel

—coming forward to lay hands on her in her own house. Ay, and I could see her wild disordered brain showed her more than these—for, as she fixed her eyes on the bare wall, such a look of horror came over her face, that it might have been Martha on her deathbed that she saw and heard crying to her, in her weak, piping voice, “Susanna! Susanna! right those that I have wronged!” It was as if she fancied the dead as well as the living whom she had injured were coming about her to lay rough hands on her, for her pale blue eyes rolled distractedly, and she kept stretching out her hands with the palms outwards, as if she were defending herself against thousands. The touch of one of the men’s hands on her shoulder seemed to madden her completely. She wrenched herself from him like a tigress, with a half-smothered shriek gave one look round, and then turned and rushed through the women and servants—who drew back shuddering—and out at the doorway into the wide corridor. The doors at the end leading on to the terrace stood open, and the moonlight poured in, so that we could see her distinctly as she flew along, tearing as she went the wedding-ring from her finger, the bracelets from her arms, the jewel-flower from her long yellow hair—ay, and even shreds of her dress. Once—(and

oh, how that set my flesh creeping, for it made everything so awfully real!)—once she turned, and gave the old look over her shoulder; and then, though not a soul had stirred to follow her, she shrieked and flew on, and on, her white-slippered feet hardly touching the polished floor. Another instant, and the lithe tall figure stood swaying on the terrace wall, sixty feet above the court-yard. The shrieks of fright suddenly changed to wild, piercing yells of laughter, the long white arms were tossed into the air—and then all was still as death, and there was nothing to be seen but the white line of terrace-wall, and the jewels lying here and there on the dark floor, sparkling in the moonlight. A few minutes after, the church clock struck twelve, and the bells broke out—the black year was over!

* * * * *

You may be sure the young Squire (God bless him!) didn't want for kind hearts about him, and careful doctoring; but for all that he lay for three days between life and death. On the fourth day he woke from a heavy sleep, and for the first time since he had seen *her* leaning over him, he seemed perfectly sensible. It had been an anxious morning, for the doctor had told us some change, for better or worse,

must come in a few hours, and crowds of people hung about the place, waiting to hear. The gentry who had taken the upper hand at the Hall could not keep the poor women from pushing in and listening at the bedroom door; some even got into the room, and sat hushing their babies behind the curtains. I was the first person he asked for when he opened his eyes; and when I bent down to him, he said—

“Matthew, where is she? I’m glad you’ve got her away; but she must be looked after. She mustn’t starve, nor come to any harm.”

“Stephen,” I said (and it seemed a comfort to him to hear the old name), “Susanna won’t harm herself or any one again. She’s dead!”

He stared at me as if he couldn’t understand me, at first; then a kind of light came over his face—and he burst into tears, and threw himself into my arms, and said, after awhile—

“I shan’t die, Matthew. I’ll live, and try and forget all that’s past, and do my duty by these poor people, as my father did.”

END OF “OLD MATTHEW’S PUZZLE.”

...a few more, and then I
went about the place, waiting to hear
who had taken the wagon hand at the fall meeting.
Keep the poor woman from passing in and out
at the back door; keep even her from the
and all, saying that I had behind the curtain
was the first person he asked for when he entered the
every and when I bent down to look at the
Matthew, who as I had said, was not far
away, but she must be looking after the
about, not come to any harm."
Stephen, I said, and it seemed a wonder to
him to hear the old man say "Stephen won't harm you
tell or any one else, I don't doubt it."
He stared at me as if he couldn't understand me
at first; then a kind of light came over his face, and
he dug into his coat, and drew himself into my arms,
and said, "I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it."
And then, "I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it."
I forget all that, but I do not doubt by that time
people, as my father did, "I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it."

END OF "OLD MATTHEW'S TRAIL"

GENTLE JACK.

GENTLE JACK

THERE is a high wind and a high tide in a little town on the Sussex coast this Christmas-eve. It is a gay little town in its brief season, and asks wicked prices for its small lodgings, its provisions, and crazy carriages, and more crazy bathing-machines; but now it is doing penance for all its pleasant little summer vices. Its winter sackcloth, cold and black, is about it; and it is strewn, if not with ashes, with its beach stones, which the waves tear up and cast about them, paying back the attacks that all the idle loungers have made upon them in the same manner through the summer-time. The Parade has vanished from view as utterly as have the bright throngs that walked there in the moonlight and music of last September. It is hidden completely by the sable company of waves that dance there to their own and the wind's music, and that on such a night as this even cross the road, and beat for admittance on the windows of the front lodging-houses, and mockingly remind the landladies, as

they shut them out, that they will have no more eligible lodgers than themselves yet for a weary while.

What light there is is surely concentrated in one spot—a shingly corner behind the town, where bathing-machines, with their ladders drawn up, stand like dogs with their tails between their legs. Very white and cold they look contrasted with the black cottages facing them, and the black forge that sends out light strong enough to be seen by travellers on distant lonely roads in this flat country; sailor lads and men, with handkerchief-bundles, going home to spend Christmas; and sisters and daughters and sweethearts out at service coming home to meet them.

The work of pudding-making is going on hotly in the cottages; and the turned-out husbands who won't stone raisins, chop suet, or mind baby, take refuge in the forge; where, with faces like red Indians in the light of the smithy fire, they are listening to a story of the town well suited to such a night. The smith himself is telling it:—

When I first come to this forge, my next-door neighbours were a family of the name of Hurlan.

They were a seafaring family, by which I mean they all got their living by the sea. There was Joe Hurlan, tall, lithe, strapping, black-eyed, with a fury

of a temper, who sailed his little fishing-boat, and earned the pounds. There was old Mary, his wife, fat, round, blue-eyed, placid—kept her bathing-machines, taught the lady-visitors to swim, ducked their children, and earned the shillings. There was young Mary, slim, blue-eyed, and placid too—dried the towels and bathing-dresses on the beach, and earned the pence. There were five small girls and five small boys, who went out to sea along with father, and carried towels and gowns to and fro between young Mary on the shingle and old Mary with her machines on the sands, and earned the halfpence. Eleven children, and father and mother, you would think enough for the sea to have to provide with food, and blue gowns, and blue shirts, and tarpaulins, and mushroom hats. But this was not all. There was likewise a nephew of Joe's, a cheery, happy-go-lucky sort of lad, who by turns helped Joe to earn the pounds, old Mary the shillings, young Mary the pence, and the small fry the halfpence. To tell the truth, I think he liked helping with the pence best.

Now though this lad was the son of Joe Hurlan's own and only brother, whose bones had never been laid dust to dust, but were contained among the mysteries of the deep sea, and though it had been

Joe's own act to take the lad from his widowed mother, it was only too well known that uncle and nephew did not pull well together. Watching them at work, you would say it was no wonder.

Joe Hurlan was clever, quick as thought in his movements, industrious, brave as a lion, and too often not only as brave, but as furious and dangerous. Bitter words and sometimes bitter cries were heard from Joe's boat by those who cast their nets near it; and even on shore, I've heard the coastguard say, as he caught some sounds out at sea, "There's Hurricane Joe at it again."

Yet to meet Joe Hurlan in an ordinary way was to meet a right hearty, pleasant fellow, sound and true, who could spin a yarn—eh! couldn't he spin the very ale flat, and the pipes out, and show you a tempest, Joe could, any minute, as if he had it in his pocket? He was not far past forty, but he called himself Old Joe.

Now young Jack Hurlan was so much the contrary in temper and manner to Joe, that he was called Fair-weather Jack and Gentle Jack; and a harmless, happy, good-humoured soul he was.

That Jack was bred by the sea-shore there was no mistaking. Hair, face, hands, and bare breast were of

different healthy sandy-browns, and his eyes were of a misty sea blue. He was always singing, whether at sea with Joe, or drawing out the bathing-machines for old Mary, or mending nets and looking up at the pretty ladies on the Parade, or helping young Mary to fold the bathing-gowns. Not that Jack had much notion of any song: the thing he sang was a sort of chant he might have caught from the waves and stones when they mix and roll over in fresh, strong weather. There was a surging sort of rise and fall in Jack's song, which made one feel that the happiness which was the source of it was boundless as the sea. His words were his own, and, as well as any one could catch them, were these, which no doubt came to him as he was shoving the heavy boat down the sands, and expecting a fierce voyage of it with Joe:—

“Heave-a, heave O!

Pull along,

Never grieve, O!

That's my song.”

It was not a favourite song with Joe Hurlan, who apparently had a theory that the passions of the winds and waters had their equivalents in human nature, and that it was necessary to let them see it. No sooner, then, did adverse winds assail him than he

turned upon them, and upon Jack and all the world, with a fury that was far more formidable to the poor lad than the worst hurricane that ever blew.

But Jack suffered less than might have been expected. He was as ready to meet and greet his uncle's return to tranquillity and good-nature as the summer sun is to meet and greet the sea when the storm-clouds have wrecked their rage and passed away; and the result was scarcely less cheerful. Never were there two such friends, when they were friends, as Hurricane Joe and Fairweather Jack. Joe's remorse for his violence was deep though silent, and after every outburst the real affection he bore the orphan lad was strengthened by the recollection of the almost superhuman patience and gentle, sweet forbearance he had shown.

Yet Jack was merely a merry, good-humoured fellow, and, sad to say, so far from being a saint, that his uncle, who was true as truth itself, was often obliged to put a sudden stop to the torrent of fibs to which Jack gave vent when questioned, after a rough voyage, as to the bruises on his forehead or the swelling of his poor red knuckles. He had fallen out of the boat on Eelsea Rocks, and met with innumerable calamities, told in the most natural manner im-

aginable, till Joe put a stop to the telling by crying out sternly—

“Hold hard with those d—d lies, Jack, will yer?—Mary, ’twas me that mauled him.”

There were land storms no less than sea storms with Hurricane Joe, and many a time have the whole household come scampering out and taken shelter in the forge here. Old Mary has stood trembling behind the door there; young Mary there, with Jack’s arm round her waist; and the five bits of boys in their blue flannel shirts and tarpaulins, and the five bits of girls in their blue flannel gowns and mushroom hats, filled the place so that there was scarce room for the sole of one’s foot. I’d have to bear with their company till Joe would be seen slinking past, black as thunder with rage and shame.

By that time they might safely venture home; and home they would go, old Mary thanking and “God-blessing” me for the refuge, and young Mary smiling and blushing through her tears, and joining with her pretty voice in Jack’s

“Heave-a, heave O!
Pull along;”

and the little monkeys of children jumping and tum-

bling over one another, and wickedly pretending to be frightened out of their wits by the distant view of Joe's back. In an hour or two would come Joe himself, fuddled with the comfort he had taken at the Flying Fish, and with remorse and shame.

"So the devil's had hold of me again, Sturt," he'd say.

And my answer was always—"He has, Joe Hurlan; and if you don't have a reckoning with him once for all, you'll find there'll come a day he'll be too much for you."

"Right you are—I feel it," Joe would growl. Before going in, he would steal off to the town, and come home with bulging pockets; and what with the jumping and shouting and clamour, and old Mary's laugh (which at bathing-time you could hear from one end of the Parade to the other), and what with Jack's "Heave-a, heave O!" I don't know but what neighbours had more reason to complain of the peacemaking than the storm.

But Joe Hurlan's passion was not always to blow over so harmlessly. It came to pass that every fit was longer and fiercer than the last. The children crouched down lower now when they came to the forge for shelter, and no more laughed and made fun

behind Joe's distant back, but kept quietly in their hiding-places till he was out of sight; while old Mary trembled and young Mary cried much more than in old times. But I noticed that she and young Jack clung to each other closer and closer as things got worse and worse. When the girl went to meet her father and Jack after their little voyages, I noticed she would take count at once of every fresh bruise on Jack's face and hands, and grow deadly pale, and Jack's cheerful "Heave-a, heave O!" no longer comforted her.

One night—it was a week before Christmas, and the tide was in as far as Eelse-corner—Joe and the lad were at sea. I was sitting here near one o'clock; the wind was too high to think of sleep; I was sitting here half dozing, and suddenly I was aware that something more than wind was fumbling at the door.

"Who's there?"

"Joe Hurlan."

I open it; Joe comes in, with his head shrunk into his neck, and his back bent, his face livid, and his eyes turning everywhere but on my face.

"Back already, Joe?" I said.

He did not answer me, but went to his usual seat

by the fire and sat down. I stood still before the open door; something made me suspicious of him.

"Where's Jack?" I asked him.

"Gone to his mother's," he said; then clenched his hands and rocked himself over the fire. Jack's mother lived as a sort of servant at the coastguard station, twelve miles off.

"How's that," said I, "when you've but just come ashore?" for he was dripping wet from the waist. "He's never going to walk there this time of night!"

He looked up suddenly—such a look as I shall never forget.

"Sturt, Sturt, don't torture me! Jack's not with his mother."

"Where is he then?"

"Why did he sing in the storm, while I was cursing?"

"Joe Hurlan," said I, "where is your brother's son?"

"Why did he sing Mary's hymns when we were in danger? Why did he sing hymns praising the Maker of the wind that was taking the bread out o' the children's mouths?"

"I ask you again, Joe, where is the son of your drowned brother?"

"Why did he steal my Mary's heart, and make her hate her own father for beating him?"

"You wretch, where's Jack?"

"He might have made a struggle—it's his own fault. He knew it 'ud rile me more to put up his hands like that, and cry out, 'Uncle, you and father were brothers—you'd never kill me!'"

"You pitiful scoundrel," says I, seizing his collar, "what have you done with Jack?"

"Let go! Didn't I tell you he's with his mother?"

"Will they find him there when he's sought for to-morrow, as he will be?"

"*Find him—find him?* O my Jack! they should tear me limb from limb, if that would find him!"

"Joe Hurlan," said I, "if Jack isn't with his mother, where is he?"

"*With his father!*" said Joe, in a sort of wailing whisper; "and *I* sent him there!"

And he looked up at me, quailing before me as if I should deal him instant justice.

Jack's face was before my eyes; Jack's voice was in my ears. I dared not trust myself alone with his destroyer. I only opened my door wide and pointed out; and he crept away.

I did not give Joe Hurlan up to justice the next day, as I had fully meant to do; I did not do it for reasons I shall tell you by-and-by.

Joe did not evade me nor put himself in my way. He did not give himself up, as I half expected he would. He told me afterwards it would have been almost a relief to him to do it, as far as he was concerned; but he had not the courage to undeceive his wife and young Mary and all at home, who believed thoroughly his first statement—that Jack was at his mother's. He wondered much at my hesitation. I saw he did. In fact, once he almost told me so.

“Why do you keep the worm under your foot?” he said, putting his haggard face over the low door there, about the second evening. “Why don't you crush it at once?”

I turned my back upon him. I had done so whenever he looked over the door, as he had done several times since the night he came home without Jack. This went against the grain with him more than any words would have done.

The third evening he was there again, more haggard and wild than ever.

“Sturt,” says he, “it must be all over. I must

have swung for Jack. I must be in hell now. There's nothing worse than this—there can't be. They'll drive me mad. It's 'When Jack comes back,' from morning till night. What's the use of letting Christmas come? They'll know fast enough then, when it comes without him, that he'll never come at all. What d'ye say? Shall I make an end of it?"

I did not look at him or answer him, and he drew a long breath and crept away. He did not make an end of it that day.

The next morning, about twelve o'clock, he came straight into the forge, and clutching my arm, said—

"Come out—come out, and tell me what the fools are all gaping at."

Shaking him off, I walked with him down to the road before the Parade, which was torn and tumbled about by the high tides, as it will be to-morrow. It was a fine bright morning, and all the gentry (there used to be more winter gentry than we have now) had turned out, and were standing in little groups looking at something out at sea. All the townfolks had turned out too, and were looking at the same thing. We asked an old sailor what it was, and he told us it was a dead body out just beyond the pier. Parson Browne—he was one of your sea-fanciers—

was coming ashore that morning at four o'clock; and he had seen it, and given proper notice, and it had been fastened by a rope to a little sailing-boat.

There were some railings where we stood, dividing the road from a field the sea had laid waste. Joe leant against these with a row of other watermen, and looked out in the same direction as everybody else looked. All that could be seen of the thing they looked at from this distance was a small dark line on the bright glittering water between the Pier and the little boat. The motion of the waves made it first rise at one end and then the other with a monotonous rocking movement.

I left Joe looking at it, and returned to my work. In the afternoon I went down to the sea again, and found all the town there; and more fine ladies than in the morning were on the Pier and Parade looking at the little dark line on the sunny water.

Joe Hurlan was in the same place. He had been fetched home to dinner by the children, and had slunk back again.

By this time all was ready for bringing *it* ashore. The shell that had been made for it in the morning was down on the beach, ready for it to be lifted into out of the boat that was just setting off to fetch it.

Four men were going out in the boat. Just as it was putting off, one of them, a young fellow who happened to be a chum of Jack's, sickened at the job, and asked to be let off.

Joe wiped the moisture from his forehead with his sleeve when he saw this. It struck him that the young man had a sort of instinct about the thing, though not the slightest suspicion was afloat in the town about Jack's absence.

The lad was let off, and the three boatmen looked about for some one to take his place. No sooner did they catch sight of Joe's tall strong form leaning against the rail than they settled on him as the man of all men to be above letting any squeamishness stand in the way of a bold waterman's duty. They hailed him from the beach: "Ahoy there, Joe Hurlan! Bear a hand!"

Joe stood still. If ever a face aged years in a few seconds, his did. Crowds were looking at him, the man for whom the boat waited; they were impatient to see it off.

What was he to do? He was not a man who might refuse with impunity on the score of nervousness, he with his herculean frame and dark strong face. Yet to go to draw the thing in nearer and

nearer, while all the town gazed on it, and would gradually recognise the features and form of its favourite,—draw *that* in, while the children all stood there, clustered thick as shell-fish on the groin, ready to see all, and shriek, “It’s Jack, it’s Jack!”—draw *that* in, while young Mary stood beside her mother, moved as if by some strange instinct to look on a scene he was sure she would at other times avoid! *She* would know him. Yes, Joe was sure of that; was sure, however altered Jack might be by cruel death and a cruel restless grave, Mary would know him—would know both the murdered and the murderer at a glance, and proclaim them both in her agony to all the world.

It rushed, all this did, in a minute through Joe’s mind as he leant against the rail; and all eyes waited and watched to see him answer the summons he had received.

Would he go? I wondered; but as I wondered, he dragged his hat lower over his eyes, crossed the road, and dashed noisily down to the beach, plunging through the shingle with long determined steps.

The young fellow whose place Joe was to fill helped to shove the boat off, and in doing so mur-

mured his friend Jack's own peculiar cry or song, which he had caught of him—

“Heave-a, heave O!
Pull along.”

Joe started up, with an oar raised as if he would brain him; but mastered himself, sat down again, and contented himself with cursing him and his noise.

The boat sped on at last, riding evenly over the bright water, and showing no signs of the awfulness of its errand, except perhaps in the stillness and uprightness of the four men, each of whom kept his pipe in his mouth in a steady business-like way.

The little sailing-boat, to which the dark little line was attached, was reached. A man—not Joe—unfastened the rope, and tied it to the other boat; and presently the four erect figures were rowing shorewards, and the dark line coming with them, held in tow at about three yards' distance. Steadily, gently it came along nearer and nearer, with the bright sunshine upon it and the gaze of all the town. Nearer and nearer it came, till it began to assume other shape and substance than the thin black line it had before appeared.

The crowds pressed close to the Pier-side and to

the edge of the Parade, and were beginning to distinguish the white face from the dark clothes of the floating form, when one of the four boatmen took a large dark piece of stuff from the bottom of the boat, and pulling the rope till the drowned man was nearly close to it, threw it carefully over, entirely concealing the face and form.

"That was father," I heard young Mary say. "O mother, how good of him! I couldn't help looking, and it would have been so horrible to see it!"

Joe's terrors that this crime would find him out when the face of the dead man was seen were groundless; for it was so fearfully injured and changed, that not one of Jack's old mates recognised him as they placed the body in the shell, and bore it as that of a stranger, and laid it inside a shed in the coal-yard.

At night, when a pair of strong but listless arms were thrown over the door there, and a pair of wild coal-black eyes were fixed on my fire, I was bad enough to almost pity the poor wretch. I knew something of the misery he suffered. I knew that if the picture of that bright sea and the pier-stands, and the black line moving up and down, up and down—I knew that if this was so clear before *my* eyes wher-

ever I turned that night, it was all far more horribly clear before his.

He didn't speak till I went to push him off and shut up for the night, and then he muttered—

"I shall give up the game in the morning. I shall go to Chalmers" (Mr. Chalmers was a magistrate) "and tell all. What's the use of waiting till his mother comes and knows him, or till my lads find him out, as they will to-morrow. All the watermen and boys are ordered to go down and look at it to-morrow. *I* must go, and I should do for myself alongside of him; for I couldn't deny Gentle Jack in death, however I used him in life."

The morning on which Joe had determined to give himself up was Christmas-eve; and when I looked in upon him, to see if he meant to carry out his resolution, I found him sitting by the fire, already dressed and his hat in his hand, waiting for the time when he thought Mr. Chalmers would be up.

I sat down opposite to him, and was invited to stay breakfast by old Mary. Looking about me, I saw that a new torture had begun for Joe Hurlan.

Everybody was expecting Jack, and preparing and watching for him. It seemed he had never been away yet on Christmas-eve, and old Mary, young Mary, and

all the children were quite confident he would turn up in time for breakfast. There was his mug, with "Jack" on it in gold letters, on the table in the old place, and his plate filled with slices of bread-and-butter two inches thick, and one of young Mary's mince-pies at the top. I tried to prevent the children running out so often to look for him, as I saw it was making Joe almost mad, though he sat very still and silent, with his eyes by turns travelling from the fire to the clock.

At last they gave up all hopes of poor Jack's coming to breakfast, and sat down to the table rather sulkily. As for young Mary, I saw that many times she could not keep the tears from her eyes; and Joe saw it too, and turned his face.

As he was taking his food up and laying it down again untasted, he suddenly started, and stared towards the open door; then gave a sort of laugh and dashed his hands over his face, as if he were scarcely awake. I supposed that he was now troubled by a dread of being found out and sent for before he made his own confession to the magistrate.

Before another minute had passed he started again in the same way, and stared at the door, and listened with the colour dying out of his dark face.

This time, instead of checking himself and getting quiet again, he only grew more and more excited, till at last he started up and cried—

“I *do* hear it—I’m *not* mad! Lord above! what is that?”

Joe stood holding his long arm stretched over the table and the children’s heads, commanding silence.

Silence there was too, till something better and sweeter than any music Joe Hurlan ever heard began to fill our ears; and that something was a well-known and well-loved voice, singing heartily as ever, as it came nearer and nearer the door—

“Heave-a, heave O!

Pull along;

Never grieve, O!

That’s my song.”

There was a stir among the children, a knocking over of chairs and a rushing to the door, at which Joe stared as if expecting to see some unearthly thing. He thought, he has told me, that he half-expected to see that fearful thing from the coal-yard appear at his door as the singer of Jack’s song. He has told me, too, how he seemed lifted from hell to heaven when, instead of *that*, he saw Jack’s own living face, fair and brown and smiling, and Jack’s own honest blue eyes,

gentle as ever—a little less merry perhaps, but the more human-like for being a little serious and anxious, as they sought out Joe's own guilty self. He would not have much to say to the clamorous children, did not even notice young Mary, to her gentle amazement; but went straight to Joe and stood before him. Joe looked at him still as if he was a being of some other and more wonderful world than ours.

"Uncle!" said Jack.

Joe stretched out his hand like one in a dream, and touched the lad's hair; then gripped his shoulder as if to make sure he was verily Jack in the flesh; and then he laid his arm against the wall and turned his face to it, muttering only—

"Lord above!"

Jack looked at him wonderingly, then his face grew more serious than I had ever seen it, and giving me rather an angry look, he said—

"Uncle, this is Mr. Sturt's doing, my staying away all the week. I sent to ask him if I might come home, or if you'd rather me lay-to at mother's till you'd forgiven me; and he sent me word I'd better bide where I was. I should a-come last night, but mother wanted me to wait and bring old Lewis with me, as he wanted to see this body you've had ashore

here. He's seen it, and says it's the chap that was drowned from a schooner off Brighton six weeks ago."

As Joe still remained with his face against his arm, Jack said in a low voice—

"Didn't you think I shud get in all right, uncle? It wasn't so far from Slater's Creek as I've often swum."

Still Joe was silent, and Jack's good-humoured face much troubled.

At last Joe looked up, and said—

"Mary!"

His wife went to him, thinking he was ill.

"Not you," he said rather huskily and ungallantly. "Young Mary—the prettiest, the best Mary." And as young Mary came, he said in a thick voice, "And Jack, if she were a thousand times better and prettier, she wouldn't be good enough to thank you—to love you—to thank you and love you all—her life—for her wicked—bad old father."

And they were married, and lived all together, and went on merrily earning the pounds, shillings and pence, though on another and more profitable coast.

By this time several wives came to summon the

blacksmith's listeners home; but he still let his forge-fire burn brightly, and it cheered the Christmas waits as they came by, singing about peace on earth, and good-will towards men.

END OF "GENTLE JACK."

UNCLE NED.

UNCLE NED

THE most trying thing about Uncle Ned was his resemblance to his brother. It was sufficiently disagreeable to have an old man with tastes so low and habits so unpleasant fastened upon the family at all; but to see, and to know all saw, in this person the Leffler figure, and the Leffler features, and all the Leffler peculiarities to the very finger-nails, was a misfortune which demanded the whole of that fortitude of which the family motto boasted.

All attempts at reforming Uncle Ned had long since been abandoned. His brother, the doctor, had now grown accustomed to silence the complaints of his wife and children by half-reproachful reminders of that complete and final release which the whitening hair and battered frame seemed to prophesy was near at hand. No other comfort concerning the old man presented itself; and even this, suggested by his appearance and sometimes rambling mind, was made faint and doubtful by his good appetite, long walks, and early hours.

Uncle Ned had for years submitted himself to

abject dependence on his brother. He could not work, he could not cope with strangers. Innumerable were the situations his brother had obtained for him, and the wardrobes Mrs. Leffler with willing fingers had prepared, and the departures that Uncle Ned had made; but swift had been the return on each occasion, pathetic the tale, irresistible the prayer to be allowed to stay.

The doctor continued his efforts from time to time; but, finding them always followed by the same results, and finding also that as the tall old form and noble-looking, half-vacant face grew more and more like his father's, it became more and more difficult for him to force him from under his roof. The doctor, therefore, had settled in his own mind and made the family aware he should not again seek a situation for Uncle Ned until he was compelled to place him in that from which return is impossible.

He was certainly a formidable incumbrance—one whom it was as impossible to conceal from society as it was to expect society to receive. Though his peculiar habits rendered it necessary for him to be banished from the room on the arrival of visitors, no one could be sure he would not come back for his snuffy pocket-handkerchief left lying on his niece's

work-basket, or one of his enormous slippers dropped in his precipitate retreat, and in search of which all the ladies would have to rise, and turn about, and look under their chairs, while the doctor and Mrs. Leffler stood in sick, smiling patience; and uncle bowed and apologised, and uttered most absurd compliments, and made—as his nieces afterwards would declare—a “fearful exhibition” of himself.

Uncle Ned was full of admiration for these nieces, but they were scarcely able to appreciate his high opinion of them, their beauty, elegance, and accomplishments, since he was in the habit of confiding his opinion to the footman and the cook, who were kept well informed by him as to the conquests and matrimonial chances of the young ladies; and, indeed, as to most of the family affairs, private or otherwise, with which he might happen to become acquainted.

It was no longer of any use trying to keep him from talking to the servants. Who else could or would talk to him? His brother had done his utmost to frighten and persuade him out of the habit, had insisted on each member of the family devoting an hour a day to him, that he might not be driven to this extremity. But all was of no use. Uncle Ned was tiresome, and failed to keep his appointments.

The young people were full of their own cares and pleasures, or rather of the pleasures which were their cares. The strong young wings wearied of trying to fly so low as this maimed and degraded old eagle; so they left it, and pursued their own bright flight.

Uncle Ned now, therefore, almost unhidden, carried his paper down to the kitchen every morning, and read leading articles to the cook, who without ceremony ordered him from place to place, to suit her convenience; while the housemaid would peep over his shoulder at the advertisements, and the footman sit on the table, discussing politics with him, undisguisedly patronising.

The doctor could do nothing but sigh hopelessly as he, passing the kitchen stairs for a stroll in the garden, heard that fine old voice losing every day something of its nobility of tone, and that pure accent becoming so uncertain and vulgarised. Yet it would have been well for the family had Uncle Ned confined his friendship to his brother's servants solely. This, however, was not the case; for the doctor had more than once surprised him, before breakfast, standing on the step, leaning against the area railings—his skull-cap on the back of his head, his hands in the pockets of his old dressing-gown—asking the

milkman's advice on some delicate family matter, hitherto supposed to have been a secret from Uncle Ned himself.

Led gently away by his brother's trembling arm, and sternly, yet entreatingly remonstrated with in the seclusion of the doctor's study, Uncle Ned defended his conduct on the score of the milkman's being a very remarkable man, a gentleman under a cloud, a person of considerable mental endowments; and the interview would be brought to an abrupt close by an earnest recommendation from Uncle Ned that his friend should be asked to dinner.

Among the nursemaids in the park, no less than amongst his brother's domestics and tradespeople, Mr. Edward Leffler was incessantly discovering some "highly-gifted mind," or some "fine nature," that demanded not only the devotion of his morning hours, during which he would sit in speechless or eloquent admiration of the "mind" or "nature" in question, usually to the embarrassment of its owner, and of some policeman or lifeguardsman near at hand; but, unfortunately, too often demanded also homage, in the shape of a silver thimble, brooch, or ribbon, pilfered from the toilet table of one of Uncle Ned's nieces.

When the family went out of town, Uncle Ned was left behind. To carry such a disgrace among fresh scenes and servants was, of course, out of the question; yet the alternative was a serious one. In fact, it generally happened that, from the moment of the family's return to the moment of its departing again, fresh revelations were constantly being made concerning Uncle Ned's peculiar modes of passing this interval of separation from his relatives.

At first when the doctor, on opening one after another of his favourite books, found himself possessed by a strong inclination to sneeze, and traced this strange effect to its cause — namely, a few grains of brown powder sullyng nearly every page — he concluded that Uncle Ned had been devoting his time exclusively to study during the family's absence. Sundry odd volumes being missing from their places, and undiscoverable anywhere else, Uncle Ned's bedroom and favourite little retreats would be searched. As to the volumes themselves, the search would be in vain, but would result in the finding of mysterious little tickets bearing mention of the missing books and their whereabouts; and not of these alone, but bearing mention also of other little trifling articles and *their* whereabouts. Perhaps the whole amount

which the exchange of the things mentioned on the tickets themselves had brought Uncle Ned would not be more than ten or twelve shillings. But the most alarming thought to the family was not, after all, the way by which the money had been obtained, but the way in which it had been spent.

Who could tell for what purpose it had gone? Perhaps in wooing to be Mrs. Edward Leffler, Mrs. Woods, the tobacconist, a widow with six children, and a person for whom Uncle Ned had confessed a feeling of no common friendship, through her likeness to a certain Lady Emily, his first love; or perhaps it had purchased a betrothal gift for Mrs. Webfoe, the charwoman, whom the master of the house was ever in fear of having introduced to him as his sister-in-law.

It cannot be supposed that the discovery of these tickets could be passed over as easily as Uncle Ned's other little eccentricities. A sense of unavoidable but useless duty compelled the doctor to summon his brother to his study, and endeavour to awaken in him some feelings of shame and penitence, but when, in obedience to his stern command, the tall form appeared, there was still so much of the old nobility about it that the doctor felt himself almost overcome

with shame at the accusation he had to bring against him, and his voice would tremble, as, pointing to the tickets on the table, he would say—

“Well, Edward, so it has come to *this*, has it, again!”

Uncle Ned, though seated in an attitude as dignified as his brother's, would gaze on the tickets with the expression of a child being chidden for a broken toy, and wondering timidly whether the fact of its being rendered useless ought not to be considered sufficient punishment, without further interference.

Sometimes when the doctor's words were more than usually stern and rousing, when his eloquence over the family honour came strongly, like the wind from mountain heights, to this poor fallen human eagle, he *was* stirred, would ruffle his feathers, and struggle to soar where he had fallen from. His brother, pausing for want of breath, would gaze upon him with some hope, as he saw the thin figure draw itself suddenly up, as if stung, the long hand trembling and hurriedly stroking the long chin, the fine blue eyes kindling to something like horror as they rested on the tickets; but the very next instant, catching sight of his brother's relenting eye, Uncle Ned would forget everything but the fact that he was about to be for-

given and set free, and the doctor saw that he had seized upon that thought with the joyous avidity of a child, though he still tried to keep the corners of his mouth drawn down, and an affectation of remorse in his eyes during the rest of the lecture.

When it was over, and the doctor looked after his retreating form, trying to cover its relief by a greater show of infirmity than usual, he sighed to think how useless it seemed even to point out to him a better state, since it was so impossible for him to reach it. Not only had fate so cast him down, but had taken away all by which he might ever hope to rise — had clipt the wings which in this world could surely never grow again. The poor eagle might ruffle its feathers and struggle, but never soar.

It did continue to struggle at times, even while its decadence went on so rapidly, when, while reading his paper, the housemaid, in her anxiety to hear of a more eligible situation, so far forgot herself as to lay her black-leaded fingers on his shoulders; or when, in the heat of a political discussion, the footman addressed him by an opprobriously familiar name; or when the cook, after the failure of repeated hints as to the kitchen fire being needed for other purposes than toasting the sole of his slipper by, dropped the

poker accidentally on his foot; on such occasions Uncle Ned was seen to change from his normal state. The half-startled, meditative look would come suddenly into his eyes, the long hand begin stroking the chin with quick, agitated fingers, the figure draw itself up, and make its retreat from the kitchen with a dignity that accorded but ludicrously with the set of the ragged and patched Indian dressing-gown, which had something of the character of the garments worn by monkeys on barrel-organs.

These attempts at flight were very rare, and of brief duration. Before his friends in the kitchen had enjoyed his absence a quarter of an hour, Uncle Ned would probably be again amongst them, assisting the offending housemaid to shell peas, helping John to spell out a love-letter from the country, or bowing at cook's elbow with his newly-filled snuff-box, and the request—

“Madam, obleege me. I have desired Mrs. Woods to put in a little more rappee than Scotch on purpose to suit your taste. You *will* obleege me.”

The gravy or sauce of such a day usually seemed to suggest that cook had not spurned the prayer, though it might have happened she had not sufficiently recovered her temper to utter her accustomed mag-

nanimous reply of—"Certingly, Mr. Edward, sir," while her huge thumb and finger filled his tiny box which he held towards her, perfectly concealing his dismay not only at so much of its contents being covered by the finger and thumb, but at so much more being scattered around in their efforts to squeeze themselves out of the box again without losing a grain of what they had secured.

One day it was exceedingly desirable that Uncle Ned should be so disposed of as to leave no danger of his intrusion at a little dance to take place in honour of his eldest niece's engagement.

The task had been undertaken by Dr. Leffler at the tearful entreaties of his daughter, who, in consideration of the high birth and poetic temperament of her betrothed, implored that he might be spared the sight of Uncle Ned until a closer intimacy would allow of some explanation as to his condition.

The queen of the evening was Uncle Ned's special favourite, and the object of his most intense admiration. Ever since he had heard of the engagement he had been in a state of wild anxiety to see the person for whom all those affairs of Sophy's, in which he had shown her such lively though inconvenient sympathy, had been brought to so sudden a termination. But

though Uncle Ned rushed out into the area, and stared up every time he heard a carriage stop at the house, he had always as yet managed to miss *his* carriage; though he had paced the hall for half an hour when he knew him to be in the house and on the point of taking his departure, he had been always beguiled away before the moment came, and listened at a distance to the buoyant step and voice in indignant disappointment. He did at last obtain a sight of him through the keyhole, and spent some time there—rushing down every minute to confide to the servants his impressions of the bridegroom elect from this narrow point of view, then rushing back to it again. These impressions, unfortunately, were such as to make him more eager than ever for an introduction. Countless pieces of paper were found about the house, the beginning of letters presenting “Mr. Edward Leffler’s compliments to Captain Aldyce,” and begging for an interview at Mrs. Woods’, or at some other of Uncle Ned’s choice resorts, at the captain’s earliest convenience. These notes sadly alarmed Sophy, who felt sure the writer was waiting his opportunity to throw one into the captain’s carriage, or have it delivered to him in the house, as perhaps it would be, in her own presence.

All his efforts failing, Uncle Ned had of late begun to give way a little to despondency. This had been brought on by a severe cold he had caught through waiting half an hour in the area on a foggy evening just to see the captain's carriage-lamps flash by. He had not been out for the last day or two, to the wonder of several small pensioners of his, to whom he made a daily allowance of hardbake out of the little money with which the doctor ventured to trust him for his snuff. He had passed most of his time in the kitchen, had been rather more silent—"mopish," as cook expressed it—and altogether less sociable than usual, muttering, when asked what he would take to eat, some gloomy allusion to a dry crust, and snappishly offering, when asked where he would sit, to go to the coal-hole, if his doing so would afford anybody satisfaction.

Dr. Leffler found him seated by the fire, and his first glance at him led him to expect even more opposition to Sophy's wishes than he had anticipated.

"I'm sorry to hear your cold's worse, Edward," he said, in a professional tone. "You must go to bed very early."

To his surprise Uncle Ned answered immediately—

"Yes, Theodore, I think I will go to bed early to-night."

"I would, indeed, Edward," urged the doctor.

"I think I'll go now, Theodore," declared Uncle Ned, rising from his chair.

"Well, I really would," agreed the doctor, trying hard not to appear too much relieved.

He began to think, as he gave Uncle Ned his arm up the stairs, that he must have forgotten about the party altogether, but as he gave him over to John's care in the hall, he was undeceived in this matter by Uncle Ned's observing quietly, as he looked round at the camellias and lights—

"I should like to have seen Sophy when she's dressed."

"You shall do so," said the doctor. "Sophy shall run up and see you, only you must not trouble her about anything. She is over-excited, as it is; you must not add to her excitement by troubling her in any way."

"No, Theodore," answered Uncle Ned, meekly, and after one dazed, lingering look at the lights and flowers, passed up the stairs with John.

He kept his word, for when Sophy went up to his little room at the top of the house, John carrying two

candles before her, and her maid keeping her dress from touching the floor, Uncle Ned only raised himself on his elbow and gazed at her till the tears came into his eyes, then he lay down again, saying gently—

“Thank you, Sophy; I am much obleeged to you, Sophy. I haven’t excited you, have I, Sophy? Tell your father I have not excited you, my darling.”

Sophy assured him, with a conscience-smitten tenderness, and, throwing him a flower out of her bouquet, and curtseying with mock solemnity at the door of his little room, left him by himself.

Cook had promised to send him up some gruel, but forgot all about it, and he lay in the dark listening to the music, and thinking of his darling, all loveliness, and love, floating among the lights and flowers, and of the bright young conqueror, whom he was not allowed to see.

After lying so long a time, he heard John bounding up the stairs to take a peep at himself before attending at supper.

Uncle Ned called to him, but he tripped down again, calling back carelessly—

“Can’t stop now, Mr. Hedward. Just a-going into supper. Lie down and keep warm now, or we shall be a-having brunkeetis set in. Be up directly. *Haw rewore.*”

It was about half an hour past midnight when John whispered something to Dr. Leffler that caused him to go out of the room, and go straight up to Uncle Ned's attic.

The doctor sat down on the edge of his brother's bed, scarcely knowing for a moment or two what it was which had so shaken him—his sudden ascent of the stairs, the sight of Uncle Ned's face, or the weak cry with which he had greeted him.

"Theodore, I will see him—I've a *right* to see him."

"Be quiet, Edward; you shall see whom you like; but don't excite yourself. What is the matter? Have you been alone long?"

The quiet, authoritative, professional tone and manner had some effect. Uncle Ned became a little calmer.

The doctor gave John some directions, sent him down-stairs, made an alteration in the arrangements of the pillows, then sat down again and felt his brother's pulse.

"Theodore."

"Don't talk, Edward; don't talk just now," said the doctor; "presently will do."

"No, it won't, Theodore. I want to tell you something."

"Well, if it will relieve you. But you must be very quiet."

"Theodore, the night father died—you know I was alone, taking care of the house—me and Mrs. Webfoe. I was out when they brought him home in the fit; I was taking a cup of tea at a friend's—excellent woman, Theodore—perfect lady, though reduced to a mangle."

"Don't excite yourself, Edward, pray," said the doctor, beginning to have appalling forebodings as to the actual existence, after all, of the long-dreaded sister-in-law. "Well?"

"We had conversed on the subject of your quarrel with poor father, and she joked me about being likely to have all if he should die before you made it up, and said that people *did* say he had a will made in my favour. Then they fetched me, Theodore—Mrs. Webfoe came in a cab for me."

"Now you *are* exciting yourself, Edward."

"Theodore, he *did* have a will, leaving all to me; he put into my own hands—this—this——"

"Be quiet; pray be quiet," said the doctor, half dreamily, keeping one of his brother's hands as he took the thing they thrust into his.

He was almost startled out of his usual inscrutable

pulse-feeling expression. How great and sudden a change must have come to the poor weak isolated mind—all unnoticed—for such an idea to have found place and conviction in it! At that moment a recollection of his brother's manner when he had returned home after his father's sudden death, caused the doctor to think over the words he had just heard in an entirely different spirit.

After sitting looking into his face a minute, he got up slowly and went to the candle with the paper Uncle Ned had given him. There was no mistaking it for the very same whose reported existence twelve years ago had filled his heart with misgiving and bitterness.

"What made you do this, Edward? How could you receive me as owner of all, and remain yourself almost—God forgive me!—almost penniless? How could you, Edward?"

"Was I fit to be anything but almost penniless, Theodore?"

"But why not have told me—have shared it with me equally?" asked the doctor, with almost passionate reproach.

Uncle Ned sighed and shook his head.

"Ask your own spirit"—he said "sperit," in imitation of cook—"ask your own spirit, Theodore. You

know as well as I do, you would almost have cursed your poor father, Theodore—you know you would—and let your children starve, rather than let them touch a penny of his money so left. Ah, *I* knew you, Theodore—*I* knew you. I knew it must be all or nothing. I says to myself, What am I? I only want to see the children happy, and find a home amongst 'em. And I *have* found a home, and been a turrable trial to you, Theodore; but it won't be for long—I feel it won't be for long, Theodore."

The doctor sat with his face buried in his hands. The story had not startled him. He knew that such an act was simply natural to Uncle Ned. There had not been the slightest heroism about it; it had been his *easiest* course, and therefore the one most pleasant to him.

"But, Theodore, you wouldn't always let me see you happy. Sophy won't let me see her happy; she won't let me see young Aldyce. It's *too* bad, that is, Theodore."

"I will fetch them," said the doctor, huskily; "they shall both come up."

"Stop, Theodore," cried Uncle Ned, with a vehemence that left him breathless.

When the doctor reached the bedside, he had turned his cheek to the pillow, and closed his eyes.

"Don't call 'em," he said, faintly. "I like to hear the music, and to think they're happy. Don't make 'em leave off for me. I'd rather not see *him* now. I won't have her made to leave off dancing and set a-crying with her happy eyes. Not to-night, Theodore. Let her dance; let her be happy. Bless her!"

After watching by him some little time, Dr. Leffler ventured to disobey the master of the house so far as to summon his relatives and Captain Aldyce to his bedside.

Uncle Ned was so favourably impressed by Sophy's choice, that he left him a verbal introduction to carry to his special friend the policeman, lodging at Mrs. Woods', whose acquaintance he strongly advised the captain to cultivate.

He passed away at seven o'clock in the morning, in the presence of all he loved, and looked on by a landing full of honestly-regretful eyes.

The Indian dressing-gown was bequeathed to Captain Aldyce, and now serves as a nursery divan, the bright colours of which baby hands pat adoringly. The slippers were left to cook, their owner having observed, he said, that she had a Cleopatra foot. The snuff-box had so many claimants that the doctor, to settle the matter, decided to retain it in his own possession.

END OF "UNCLE NED."

THE RETIRED APOTHECARY.

"It is a curious sensation, Martha," said the ex-apothecary of Sea-walls to his old servant, six months after he had retired from business; "it is a more curious sensation than I can describe, this feeling of having attained—*really* attained—the height of one's ambition."

"It's the height of it I complain of," answered Martha, with a shiver. "I'm sure for cold it's Rooshia or Prooshia as compared with down in the town."

Mr. Joseph Mulsent, or, as he was sometimes called in compliment by "advice gratis" seekers, "Dr." Mulsent, made no reply to old Martha's complaint as to the bleak position of "Outlook Villa."

He had already many times explained to her the advantages of the site he had chosen for it—the pleasant down between the two cliffs, overlooking the bay, and with the view (by telescope) of the parade and the High street;—had often bade her observe how the corner of the Castle Hill might have been put there on purpose to protect it from the east wind. Still Martha would grumble and declare that all they got from overlooking the town was the smoke of the

chimneys; that as for the telescope, if other people could "persuade themselves they saw more in it than brass rims and a bit of sky at the end, she never could, right forcus or wrong forcus;" and for the Castle Hill, supposing it to have been there placed for the protection of Outlook Villa from the east wind, the east wind had certainly managed to get this side of the barrier first, and to keep there.

Knowing, then, that Martha, having once possessed herself of these ideas, would cling to them with the tenacity of age and a disappointed lover of the town, peaceable Joseph Mulsent, instead of answering her, continued to make audibly his own reflections, patiently noticing the remarks which from time to time fell from Martha's lips.

"I wonder," said Joseph, leaning back in his cosy armchair, with his softly-slippered feet on the fender, and the finger-tips of one hand gently resting on the finger-tips of the other,— "I wonder how most people feel when they really possess the thing for which they have risked and struggled the chief part of their lives. I wonder whether they don't draw so much pleasure in advance by anticipation, that when they reach the bank—I mean the reality—they find their account exhausted."

"That depends on whether what they wish and struggle for is a sensible thing or a gimcrack," asserted Martha.

"Not so, Martha," answered her master, meditatively, and ignoring the slight implied to Outlook Villa,—
"not so; a man may find the object of his wish as good a thing when he has it, as he ever thought it before possessing it,—may even find it better, and yet, his enjoyment of it not be anything like what he has imagined it would be. Why is it, I wonder? May it be that all a man has to undergo in gaining his point alters his nature without his being aware of it; takes out of him, in fact, the capacity to enjoy the thing he is working for? It is a mystery, Martha; it is a mystery."

"So's a good many things," replied Martha, with emphatic though not very clear meaning; and then she rose, and taking the plate-basket, and wishing her master good-night, retired to rest.

"It's all very natural for Martha to grumble and find fault," thought Joseph, still cosily and patiently pondering his mystery, "she *is* rheumatic; her cough, too, would be chronic anywhere, like her temper, faithful soul! Of course she misses her gossip with the old milkman who's served us forty years. She fancies her life in danger now that she doesn't hear the policeman

walking past the house at certain times in the night, as we used to hear him when we kept shop. And then that queenly creature, our present servant, whom we have to make room for when we pass her on the stairs, is a trying change for poor Martha, after the bits of lassies—about seven per annum—over whom she used to rule when we lived at the shop. Yes, it's very natural *Martha* should not be happy here. And my poor old cat, that's been in the family longer than Martha and I can get anybody to believe—I suppose it's natural she *should* dart back to the old house every time she's brought here. And the cactus—my poor wife prophesied it never would live in any air but that of the little back parlour in the old house; and evidently she was right, for it's grown more and more limp every day, till now its prickles couldn't fray a rose leaf. Yes, these things are inconvenient—very inconvenient, as giving the place a sort of unhomeliness, but natural, most natural. The *unnatural* part of it all, or the apparently unnatural part of it all, is yourself, Joseph Mulsent, and your own very peculiar and unsatisfactory state of feeling."

At the instant of arriving at this conclusion the gate bell rang.

"There's Wormwood," exclaimed Joseph, and half

rose; but the absorbing nature of his reflections and the warmth and cosiness of the fireside drew him down to his seat again, and made him abandon his half-formed intention of going to let in his visitor.

Wormwood had been Joseph's assistant for the last seven years, and had purchased the business, which was now certainly not flourishing in his hands.

He was a fair, prominent-eyed, large-headed young man, who had been crossed in love, and who suffered from a melancholy as chronic as Martha's ill-temper.

As it was Wormwood's custom on first entering the room to fix his eyes on the portrait of his former master's youngest daughter and remain for a few moments morbidly oblivious of everything else, Joseph did not trouble himself to turn round or take any notice of his entrance further than continuing his reflections aloud instead of in silence. He had been used so many years to talk on to the young man without heeding whether he was present with him in the shop, or whether his avocations took him incessantly out of it, that, in the present instance, he was scarcely conscious the whole of the last hour's meditation had not been addressed to him.

"You see, Wormwood," he said, "I am not Martha."

"Certainly not, sir," answered Wormwood; which

answer, by its promptness and energy, might have warned Joseph, had he not been too much engrossed, that his successor had come to him in a most unusual frame of mind.

"No, I am not Martha," he continued, "nor have I Martha's characteristics."

"Dear me, no, sir," replied Wormwood, warmly.

"Nor am I the cat."

"Sir?"

"Nor have I a cat's characteristics."

"Far from it, sir; far, far from it."

"Nor am I a cactus."

"A cactus, sir?"

"Nor have I the characteristics of a cactus."

"Prickly, permanent, succulent, globular, or columnar, and sometimes pointed," murmured Wormwood, dreamily quoting his dictionary. "Really, sir, what *can* you mean?"

"What *can* I mean, Wormwood?" said Joseph, shaking his head at the fire, while his round amiable brown eyes dilated with a perplexity gentle and sad. "What can I mean, indeed? Why am I not—as I thought I should be here? It is a problem I should not like to take to my grave unsolved. I should not like to be

obliged to own, Wormwood, that the last and greatest transaction of my life is a failure."

Wormwood, thinking he alluded to the business and was concerned for it on his account, murmured, almost inaudibly, while he fixed his eyes on *her* portrait, and slightly gasped,—

"I regret much, sir—my inability to—to take better advantage of—of the—the brilliant opportunity you placed in my hands."

"Nonsense; I don't allude to that, Wormwood," answered Joseph, goodhumouredly. "Far be it from *me* to reproach you with *that*, or to even say a word more than I've said all along, that your system is too severe—altogether too severe. Take the babies, for instance—about whom I hear most complaints of your treatment—whatever induces you to give the remedies you do in cases where *I* should have administered a little oil of almonds and syrup of violets, I *cannot* imagine."

"My only excuse on *that* score," answered Wormwood, in a tone of depression and apology, "is to remind you that it's the very fact of your having gone to extremes in *your* treatment, that drives *me* to extremes in mine, as I had not, as you are aware, been able to buy in anything yet; consequently I have in

stock a deficiency of oil of almonds and syrup of violets, and an *immense* superfluity of castor oil."

"Well, well," said Joseph, soothingly, "we'll trust that better times may come for you before more than one generation shall be affected by this little difficulty. Why, you don't look at all well to-night, Wormwood. What's the matter? I'm just going to tell that stately being, that countess of cobwebs, to bring me my glass of rum-and-water. What will *you* take, lad?"

"A glass of cold water, if you please," replied Wormwood, darting a glance of icy despair at the portrait of the youngest daughter.

"Dear, dear," muttered Joseph, "*altogether* too severe—diet and everything—cold water and castor oil. How can he expect to prosper?"

As the object of Joseph's awe and Martha's dislike did not answer the bell, her master went out to seek her.

He had scarcely left the room when an extraordinary fit seized upon Mr. Wormwood.

Springing from his chair, he rushed towards the portrait of the youngest daughter, shaking his clasped hands before it, then rushed to the door, and shook his hands before that; then again rushed madly to and fro between the picture and the door, in a most re-

markable manner; and had but just time to sink on his chair in a breathless state before Joseph re-entered the room.

“My lady must be holding an assembly in the kitchen to-night,” he remarked. “There was a decided scuffling and confusion when I called her; then the light was put out. However, I’ve secured the necessities for our comfort, *including* your cold water.”

When the rum and water was mixed and tasted, and while Wormwood sipped *his* chosen glass, Joseph’s thoughts gradually stole back to the enigma with which they had been all the evening busied. And he began again to utter them aloud.

As he spoke, he gazed into the fire, and so did not perceive the strange excitement with which Wormwood listened, nor the emotional glances and shakes of the head he bestowed upon the portrait of the youngest daughter.

“If I had in a way wronged either of my children, Wormwood,” he said, in a self-searching, gentle, and earnest tone, “if, in building myself this home, I had neglected anything that might reasonably have been expected of me by my children, I should have as much reason for not thriving in it as Martha, or the cat, or

the cactus. But you, Wormwood, are well aware that such is not the case."

"Sir," replied Wormwood, gasping at the portrait, "I—am!"

"You well know how much I have done for each and all—all the ten of 'em, Wormwood."

"And not—*not* only as regards money," said Wormwood, looking unspeakable things at the portrait.

"No, indeed," answered Joseph, gently sipping his rum and water. "You are right there, Wormwood. No money sacrifice could ever have been like *that* sacrifice—when my youngest, and cleverest, and brightest bought a husband at the price of her father. I shall never, never, forget that moment, Wormwood, when I first understood, that afternoon, what she was trying to express to me, with all her crying, and her changing from red to white and white to red,—how slow I was to see that she really meant that man demanded that, if he married her, she must consent to see her poor old father no more—never, never any more! Ah, my little Lucy, that was a blow—that *was* a blow!"

"Ah, Mr. Mulsent!" cried Wormwood, "if you had but tried a little more to make her see the unnaturalness of such a state of things—if you had but——"

“Tut—tut, Wormwood,” interrupted Joseph, with good-natured impatience. “What sort of a life should I have had afterwards, had I succeeded in preventing her making such a match as that? Besides, I was dazzled by it myself for the child. All things considered, I felt called upon to act as I did, though, at the same time, the thought that she *could* wish it—that she *could* bear it—yes, my little Lucy, *that* was the hardest.

“It was after that, William Wormwood,” continued Joseph—“the very evening, in fact, of the day when she kissed me for the last time—it was that very evening that, to keep my heart from breaking and my life from becoming a burden to me, I said to myself, ‘Joseph Mulsent, you must now have an aim in life of your *own*. It must have nothing whatever to do with any of your children, or, having been disappointed so many times, you will work in constant fear of disappointment again, and so work will lag.’ It was then that the idea—the rough idea only—of Outlook Villa occurred to me. But as time passed it became the dream and comfort of my life. Wormwood, I have *more* than realised that dream. Looking around me now, I am obliged to confess that this home of my old age surpasses rather than falls

short of the ideal that comforted me so many lonely years. Yes, I'm admitting it almost every moment of my life; and yet, Wormwood, it is not home, and will *not* be home."

"Yet comforts abound," murmured William, timidly, "which to the widow and the orphan would appear priceless luxuries!"

"Comforts abound certainly," replied Joseph, gazing round the room as he stirred his rum and water; "though what the comforts of Outlook Villa have to do with widows and orphans I don't myself perceive, William. But perhaps," he added with a smile and shake of the head, "perhaps you are thinking of following in the track of some of my good neighbours, and hinting that I should give Outlook Villa a mistress."

"Oh dear, no," protested Wormwood, throwing out his hands in horror at the suggestion; "far from it, Mr. Mulsent—far, far from it. At least—that is to say——"

"However far from it or near to it *your* thoughts may be, Wormwood," said Joseph, "they wouldn't alter mine on *that* subject."

"What I meant was," faltered William, "that

perhaps under some unforeseen circumstances, such as——”

“Wormwood,” Joseph interrupted him in a tone of dignity and decision, “under *no* circumstances *whatever* could such a thing happen.”

“Oh sir, say nothing rash! Not *just* yet,” cried William, upsetting his glass of water in his agitation.

“Really, Wormwood, I shall be offended if you pursue the subject any farther,” Joseph declared in a voice that approached as near to angry tones as perhaps it could approach. Being as quick to lose anger as he was slow at becoming angry, Joseph smiled immediately after he had spoken, and added—

“No, no, William, a wife and eight daughters and Martha:—my courage comes to an end there.”

“You mistake me—you mistake me altogether,” cried Wormwood. “I was alluding,” he added in a low voice and with his eyes gazing as if spell-bound into his glass of water, “I was alluding when I spoke to—to—the widow and the fatherless.”

“Widows and orphans *again!*” exclaimed Joseph, raising his eyebrows in gentle surprise; “what on earth can be the matter with you, Wormwood?”

“Dear me—dear me!” ejaculated the young man, shaking his head with much distress at the portrait.

"How unfortunate I am at expressing myself! Her youngest, her speechless babe, would have done more in her cause than I can do. Mr. Mulsent," he exclaimed, rising and assuming a sudden firmness and decision of manner and attitude, "you *do* know, sir, do you not, though you have not named it to me—but that was natural—but you do know, sir, surely, that *he* is now no more?"

"First tell me, William," said Mulsent with a smile of ineffable patience, "first be kind enough to tell me who in the world you may please to allude to as 'he.'"

"Oh, sir, I mean—oh surely, you must know, I mean *him*."

"The same person no doubt; but does there happen to be no name a *little* more definite by which you might make known to me whom you do mean?"

"I mean, Mr. Mulsent," replied William, assuming a sort of desperate calmness,—“I mean your youngest daughter's husband, sir,—Sir Harry Liston.”

Joseph, who had been standing with his back to the fire and the skirt of his dressing-gown over his arm, let his arm and skirt fall, and fixing his eyes wistfully on Wormwood, asked—

"Did you say *he* was dead?"

"It is true, sir," answered Wormwood. "He died suddenly at Ascot the month before last; it was heart-disease. She is left with her five children destitute, sir,—positively destitute. She has offended his family, who will now do nothing for her, but offer to take her eldest boy, which she won't allow."

"Stop, Wormwood, not so fast," implored Joseph, coming close and laying his hand on his shoulder as he looked wistfully up into his face. "Destitute, did you say—Lady Liston—destitute!"

"Oh yes, sir,—indeed, the children were positively hungry when Lucy—when my lady drove up with the cab full of them to the shop, thinking you were still there. If you could but have seen, sir, how they devoured the jujubes I gave them, you had never forgotten it, never. *I* shall never forget it—never."

"They came to the shop—*she* came?—when?"

"To-day, sir,—this afternoon, in fact."

"And where are they now?"

Wormwood looked at the picture and gasped helplessly.

At last he said—

"Yes, her speechless babe could have done more than I have done for her, sir, though I came in here

at her request to speak to you for her. When I heard you talk of your enigma—I mean, sir, your failing to find the happiness you had always expected, reasonably enough, *to* find here.—I had it, sir, on my tongue to say that the truth is, sir, your soul had outgrown your ideal by the time you attained it. The life you lead, sir, of work and self-sacrifice to achieve this end, has made you too good, too noble, to rest satisfied with it. Unknown to yourself, sir, I do believe you've had sympathies with her—in her—to us—unknown sorrows. You——”

“Wormwood, Wormwood,” cried Joseph, shaking the excited young apothecary by the arm, “I ask you—where is she? Is she—are they at the shop still?”

“You will not be vexed? No, I am sure, sir, you will not be vexed if I tell you they came up here with me to-night; if, in fact, I tell you they are now drying their little wet feet in the kitchen.”

Joseph turned, and, with his eyes fixed on the carpet, walked dreamily towards the door.

Wormwood, after wavering like a weather-vane, on one foot for an instant, sprang after him, and taking hold of his arm, whispered—

“One word. Pray remember, sir, she says she only wishes to see you to ask forgiveness for ever con-

senting to the unnatural arrangement that was made at her marriage, and then she said—to go away where she would be unknown, to earn her own and her children's bread."

An hour later Outlook Villa verified the saying that it would soon possess a mistress, and Joseph sat with his arms round the fairest and rosiest bouquet of human buds that ever brightened the world, and kissed the five wee mouths without experiencing a single pang at the thought of having henceforth to fill them all.

In a week it was known in Sea-walls that "Mulsent had purchased back the business."

On the first morning of his return to the shop he was seen standing outside to give Wormwood some direction as to the arranging of new bottles in the window. Several of the old neighbours taking down their shutters were in some doubt as to whether it would not be the right thing to go over to Mulsent and offer their condolences on the occasion.

While, however, the butcher, cheese-monger, and baker were consulting together on this matter, and glancing simultaneously over at their apparently un-

fortunate neighbour, they were deterred from their kind intention by his nodding to them with a face that literally shone with pleasure at the sight of their familiar faces and tasks.

“Good morning, Boville; good morning, Scraggs; good morning, Way!” shouted the voice that seemed to wake all kinds of pleasant, cheeriest memories in the dull old High Street. “Here I am! Back again, you see. No rest but the grave for the pilgrim of love!”

A year has passed, though Joseph Mulsent can scarcely believe it, so swiftly and brightly have the days glided by. Wormwood is his partner, and people do say that Lady Liston is likely very soon to disuse a title that has no longer any attraction, and is decidedly inconvenient.

THE END.



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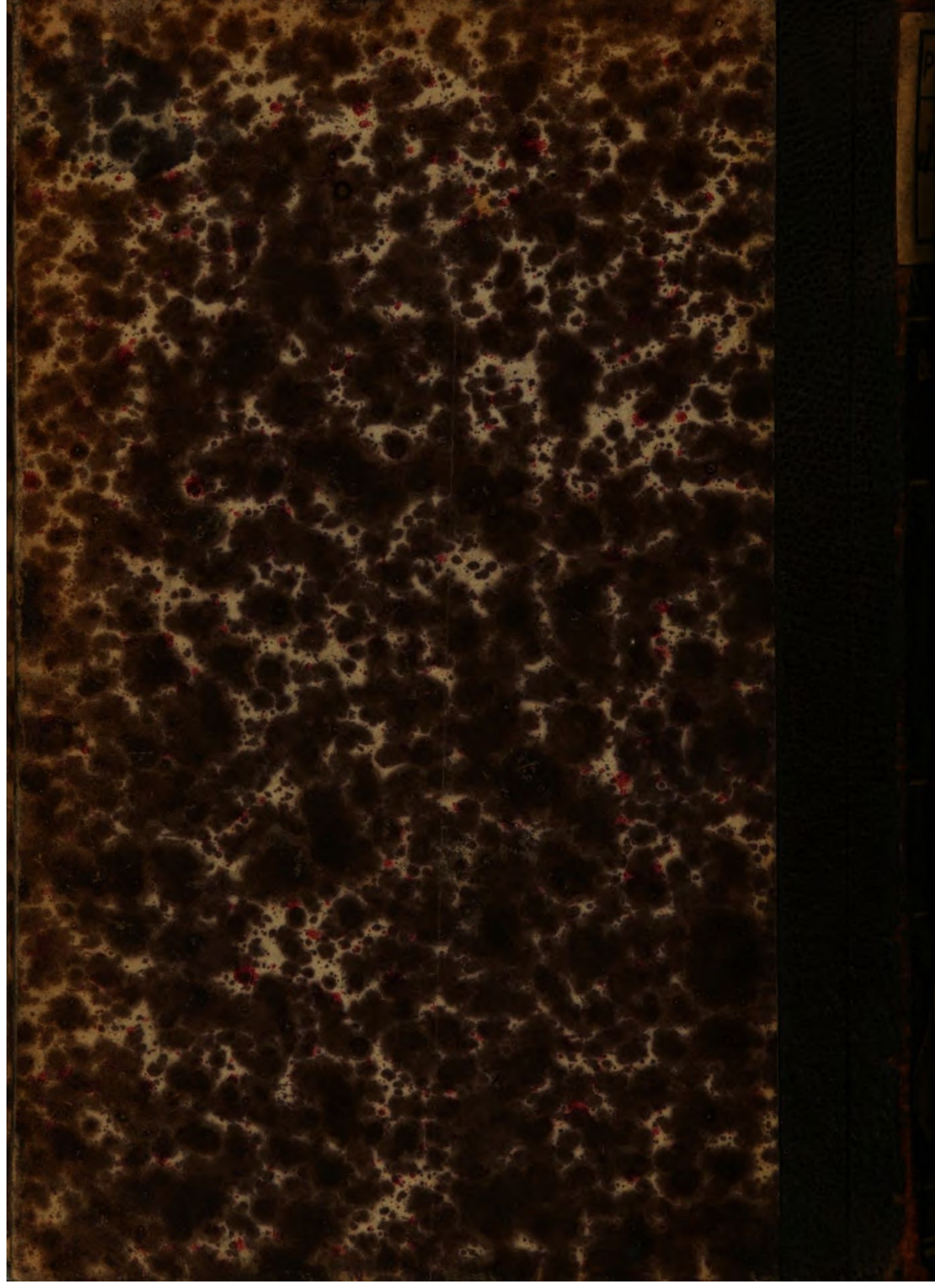
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